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Days of wrath

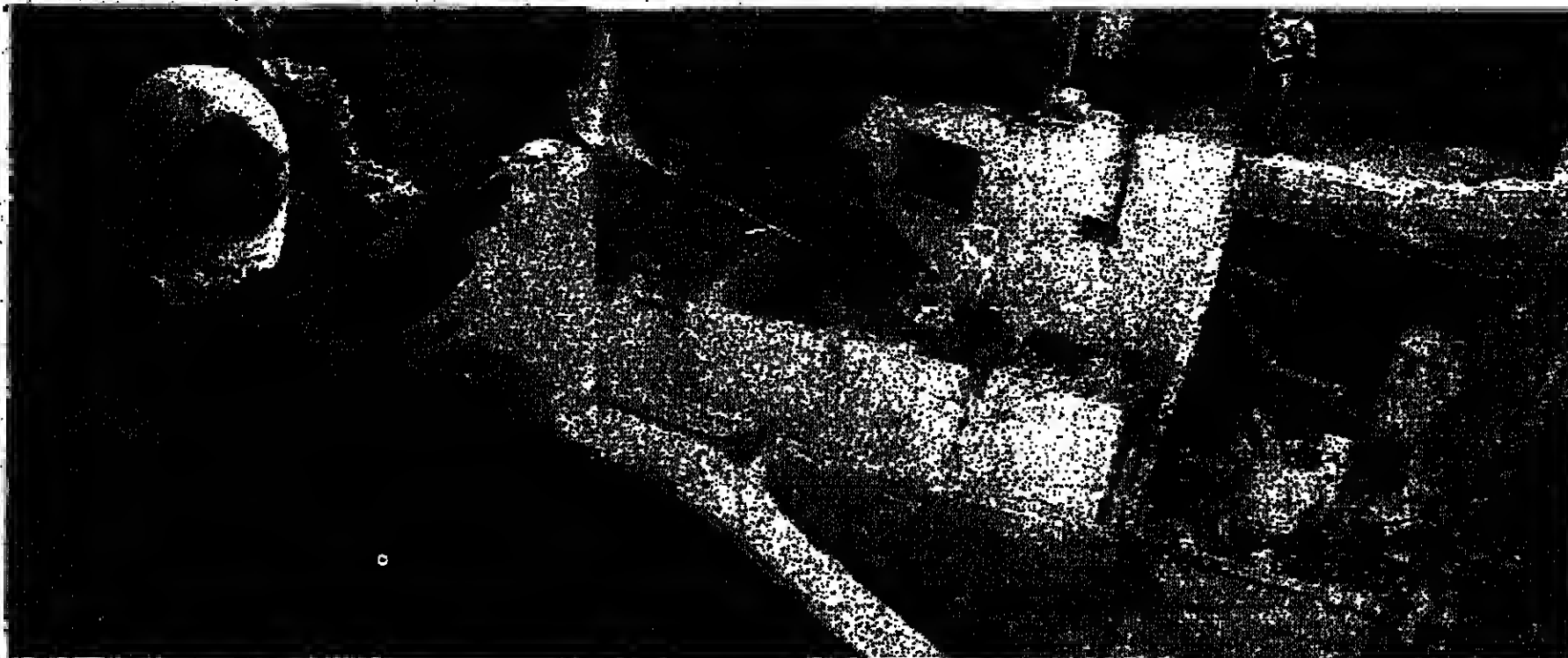


Photo: AFP

Wrath proves not to be an Israeli preserve, as angry Arab ministers meet in Cairo and the death toll mounts in Lebanon, writes Khaled Dawoud

Sure progress

IN THE run-up to the Second National Conference on Egyptian Women to be held on 21 April, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak said that progress is slow but sure in overcoming obstacles to women's development.

Speaking to Magda Mehanna, Mrs Mubarak, who will chair the forthcoming conference, said, "As the 21st century approaches, women are becoming more aware of their rights and duties."

Looking at the efforts exerted since the First Conference on Egyptian Women in 1994, Mrs Mubarak underlined advances in the areas of women's literacy programmes, health and social care services, and economic empowerment projects. She affirmed that such endeavours are simultaneously carried out in rural and urban areas.

Commenting on the plan of the Second Conference, Mrs Mubarak said, "I believe that it will simply take stock of what has been done and look ahead to giving women's development a further boost in our country."

Erez meeting

PALESTINIAN leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres are scheduled to meet today at Erez, the northern crossing point between Israel and the Gaza Strip. The talks, the first since the peace process was set back by a series of suicide bombings inside Israel in February, were expected to focus on Israel's closure of the Palestinian territories. The blockade has prevented 60,000 Palestinians from going to their jobs in Israel.

Arafat will also discuss the delayed Israeli army redeployment in the West Bank town of Hebron, which was due to have taken place at the end of March. Palestinian sources said talks on the final status of the Palestinian territories, scheduled to start on 4 May, would also be on the agenda.

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As Israeli warplanes and artillery continued to pound southern Lebanon yesterday, rocketing yet another Lebanese ambulance, killing two people and wounding 17 others, the Grapes of Wrath, code name for Israel's biggest military operation against Lebanon since 1993, seemed an apt description for the sense of outrage that has overwhelmed the Arab world since the operation began on 11 April.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, opening yesterday's one-day emergency session of the Arab League Council, labelled the meeting "the session of Arab wrath". "The significance of this meeting lies in the message it delivers, expressing the degree of anger we feel towards Israel's Grapes of Wrath. This is the session of [Arab] wrath," he said.

Echoing Moussa, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Sharaa, talking to reporters after the meeting, said the emergency session was "significant in having revealed a new Arab awareness of Israel's aggressive, rather than peaceful, intentions". Arab countries, which had previously emphasised Israel's alleged peaceful intentions, were now coming to the view that "Israel does not want peace," Al-Sharaa said. "This is an important message," he added.

At the end of their session, Arab foreign ministers issued a communiqué condemning Israeli aggression against Lebanon as "a dangerous threat to world peace and security and to the peace process in the region". It called on the international community and the UN Security Council to take appropriate measures to halt the Israeli aggression, and to implement Security Council Resolution 425, calling for Israeli withdrawal from the so-called security zone in southern Lebanon.

Declaring their "solidarity" with the Lebanese people and support for "their legitimate right to resist the occupation of their territories", the Arab foreign ministers pledged "full support" to Lebanon, including financial assistance. Lebanese Foreign Minister Farouk Bouez declined, however, to tell reporters following the meeting whether a specific sum had been promised.

The meeting asked the Arab League Secretary-General, Esmat Abdel-Meguid, to make all the necessary contacts with concerned parties in order "to bring an immediate halt to the [Israeli] aggression". However, an Arab delegate, who preferred to remain anonymous, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the ministers had discarded the idea of forming a trilateral committee that would be charged with touring major world capitals to explain the Arab position.

While the Arab League Council was silent regarding two ceasefire plans suggested by the US and France, Bouez declared that the US plan needed "radical amendments" before it was acceptable to Lebanon. Failing this, he said, "accepting the American initiative would mean accepting the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon".

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri struck a softer tone, however. Criticising the American plan on the grounds that it ignores previous UN demands for Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Hariri nevertheless affirmed that this did not mean his government rejected the plan. "We didn't dismiss either the American or the French plan. We hope to see America and France cooperate together to make a joint proposal," Hariri told a news conference in London yesterday, after an hour-long meeting with British Prime Minister John Major.

The seven-point US plan would ban Hezbollah from launching attacks on Israel's northern border region and on soldiers in the occupied "security zone" in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah would also be barred from operating from civilian villages in southern Lebanon. International monitoring and guarantees would be established to ensure that the agreement was respected. In exchange, Israel would stop hitting Lebanese towns and villages and begin negotiations for a withdrawal from the occupied border zone. The plan goes much further than an un-

written 1993 US-brokered accord under which Hezbollah and Israel agreed not to target civilian areas on either side of the Lebanese border.

While Hezbollah declared its full rejection of the American plan, describing it as an Israeli dictate, the US ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, said the Lebanese and Syrian governments were giving "serious consideration" to the plan.

US President Bill Clinton, under mounting criticism for supporting Israel's offensive, said in Tokyo that Washington was doing everything in its power to end the fighting, although he blamed Hezbollah for the week's events. Secretary of State Warren Christopher "has spent an enormous amount of time on this issue in the last few days," Clinton said. "It is important that we do everything we can to bring an end to the violence."

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, facing general elections on 29 May, insisted yesterday that his government would not be pushed into a hasty truce. "Israel wants a solution that involves written guarantees that Hezbollah attacks will end," he said. "This is not a question of one day or several days."

French diplomatic efforts continued as well, with Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette arriving back in Israel from Lebanon on a quest for an "immediate ceasefire". De Charette is extending his mission to the region, originally scheduled for three days. After talks with Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak, the French foreign minister left for Cairo yesterday evening for talks with Egyptian officials. He was scheduled to meet with the foreign ministers of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Lebanon at the offices of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry later yesterday.

Earlier, in Beirut, de Charette said France was proposing to Israel, Lebanon and Syria that the three nations put down to writing a strengthened version of the 1993 verbal understanding between Israel and Hezbollah that both should refrain from hitting civilian targets.

"It is necessary to return to the arrangements of 1993 and give them more force and more precision," de Charette told reporters. "France has, therefore, made a proposal to the three countries, inspired by this idea... We want this to be a written text approved by both sides. This written text must permit the fixing of rules in a precise and clear manner. It must put the civilian inhabitants on both sides of the frontier under protection."

Iran signalled support for the French diplomatic drive, dismissing the US initiative as "negative". Mohamed Kazem Khawansari, Iran's deputy foreign minister, told a news conference in Damascus: "The people of the region trust the French drive over the American stance, which is regrettably negative towards the demands of the Lebanese people and government."

In southern Lebanon yesterday, Israeli warplanes and helicopter gunships launched 50 air raids east of the port of Tyre and artillery gunners hammered the region at a rate of 20 shells a minute.

And, in the third such attack since the eruption of the fighting, helicopters rocketed a Hezbollah ambulance in the southern town of Nabatieh, wounding three people, Lebanese police said. Yesterday's casualties brought the toll of dead and injured since the fighting began last Thursday to 48 killed and 185 wounded, mostly Lebanese civilians, according to the Associated Press. Operation Grapes of Wrath has also forced hundreds of thousands of Lebanese to flee their homes in the south and caused an estimated \$100 million worth of damage.

Undeterred by the relentless Israeli attacks, Hezbollah fired 20 rockets across the border into northern Israel, according to UN peacekeepers. Hezbollah's defiant leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, pledged to keep up the attacks until Israel halts its military campaign.

Some salvos crashed into northern Israel, others hit an Israeli-occupied border enclave in South Lebanon. One rocket hit the Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona, where a man was injured and several cars and homes were damaged.

Israel's morbid peace

The Israeli offensive against Lebanon, writes **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem, is a calculated escalation to put the squeeze not only on Beirut but, through it, on Damascus

Israel's onslaught on Lebanon affords a grim testimony to the morbidity of the Middle East peace process. The relentless barrage of well over 5,000 shells launched by air, land and sea forces from 11 April onwards marks Israel's biggest military incursion into Lebanon since "Operation Accountability" in 1993. For the peoples of the region, it has also exposed just how little the various peace processes have resolved the real conflicts that divide them.

The main targets of the current assault, says the Israeli army's chief-of-staff, Amnon Shabak, are the guerrilla bases of Hezbollah, from which a spate of Katyusha rockets have recently been fired into northern Israel. The worst attack was on 9 April when 36 Israeli civilians were injured, most of them slightly. It is because Hezbollah "merges" its bases within civilian areas that Israel has been "forced" to hit around 200 villages in South Lebanon, according to Shabak. As for the raids on cities like Beirut and Tyre, these are "messages" to the Lebanese government to bring Hezbollah to heel. "We are warning the government of Lebanon that if [the Katyusha attacks] don't cease, we will continue to hit their infrastructure," said Brigadier-General Shmuel Zuckerman, on 15 April.

But justifications like these should be taken with a large measure of salt. For Israel's political and military leaders, the Lebanese government is no less a stooge of Syria than is Hezbollah. The real address for Israel's military offensive in Lebanon is Damascus. And the sheer disproportion of Israel's current reprisal suggests objectives of greater political import than "quiet" on Israel's northern border. It is more likely to do with changing the rules of Israel's war with Hezbollah in occupied South Lebanon. But its context is the current impasse in the Israeli-Syrian peace process.

Ever since Islamist suicide bombers killed 58 Israelis inside Israel six weeks ago, the Israeli-Syrian peace process has effectively been put on hold. Irritated by President Hafez Al-Assad's refusal to explicitly condemn the attacks, Israel suspended peace talks with Syria on 26 February. They

have yet to resume. Israeli anger increased when both Syria and Lebanon refused to attend the Sharm El-Sheikh summit on 13 March lest their presence be construed as "legitimising Israel's occupation of Arab lands".

But the real Israeli sore in recent months has been the success of Hezbollah's military operations against Israeli targets inside Israel's so-called "security zone", a swathe of land north of Israel's border that covers 12 per cent of Lebanon's territory.

Since January, Hezbollah guerrillas have killed seven Israeli soldiers and wounded 30 others inside the zone. The last fatality was on 10 April and rapidly became the spur for Israel's reprisals in Lebanon. But the lead up to the current offensive suggests less brutal retaliation on the part of Israel than a calculated escalation designed to put the squeeze on the Lebanese government and, through it, Syria.

On 30 March and 8 April three Lebanese



Some 48 civilians have died as a result of Israel's "precise bombing"

civilians were killed in villages north of Israel's occupied zone. The first attack — in which two Lebanese workers were hit by Israeli artillery fire — "was a mistake," according to the Israeli army. Israel denied any involvement in the second attack, the blowing up of a Lebanese teenager by a roadside bomb in the village of Braachit. Hezbollah has always vowed that any Israeli attacks on civilians outside of the occupied zone in south Lebanon would be met with attacks on Israeli civilians in northern Israel. Since Hezbollah viewed the Braachit killing as no less a premeditated Israeli action than the 30 March "mistake", it pitched Katyushas into Kiryat Shmona after both.

With the reprisals, Hezbollah is conforming to the "rules" that govern the war in South Lebanon. Brokered by the US after "Operation Accountability" in 1993, these essentially confined hostilities to the occupied zone, with both Israel and Hezbollah forswearing attacks outside it. But Israel has long viewed these arrangements as giving the edge to Hezbollah, since it allows their guerrillas to infiltrate the zone from areas north of it but prevents Israel's "unrestrained" pursuit of them into these areas.

Purposely or otherwise, the 30 March and 8 April attacks outside of the occupied zone scuppered these rules. And there is a suspicion that Israel deliberately broke them to pitch Lebanon into turmoil and the peace process into crisis to create the right international "pressure" to draw up new and, from Israel's point of view, better rules.

Israel's new "rules" for the occupied zone were signalled by Shimon Peres on 16 April. He said Israel's "defined targets" behind its offensive in Lebanon were not only to "stop the firing on Israeli civilians" in northern Israel, but also on "Israel's military forces" in southern Lebanon. "We don't want Hezbollah to fire at all," he said.

These "renewed understandings", say sources, form the bases of US proposals to end the conflict circulated on 16 April. But, if so, they will almost certainly be rejected by Lebanon and Syria — unless modifications are introduced. For they would amount, as Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri put it, to acting against Hezbollah to "facilitate Israel's occupation of our country". The proposals were rejected outright by Hezbollah.

As for Lebanon's proposal for ending the conflict — that Israel adhere to UN Resolution 425 and withdraw militarily from South Lebanon — this, says Peres, is "impossible" in the immediate future. Yet, without this, even if the current crisis is resolved diplomatically, its underlying cause — Israel's occupation of Lebanese territory — will ensure the war continues.

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Obituary

A provocative thinker

By Dina Rashwan



After more than forty years of intellectual, political and legal activity, the great pan-Arab nationalist thinker Dr Esmat Seif El-Dawla passed away. As is the case with any intellectual endeavour, the work of Esmat Seif El-Dawla cannot be separated from the historical context in which he lived, nor from his personal experience and the distinct make-up of his character. Nor can one divorce the basic axioms of his distinctive Arab nationalism from the larger pan-Arab movement that pervaded the Arab world in the fifties and sixties. In a word, Esmat Seif El-Dawla, like any other thinker, was a product of his times. He embodied and gave voice to the thoughts and concerns of his generation.

But this in no way implies that Esmat Seif El-Dawla was merely another version of his contemporaries and colleagues among pan-Arab nationalist thinkers. His political career and intellectual production demonstrate that he was unique in his response to the dictates of the age. His singular contribution is apparent in face of the overwhelmingly prevalent nationalist schools of thought of his day: the Baathist movement of the forties and the Nasserist movement of the fifties. Esmat Seif El-Dawla would not be a mere spokesman for either of these movements, however they may have influenced his thinking. Rather, since the sixties, when his intellectual activity was most prolific, he engaged his uniquely creative intellect in an attempt to challenge what he perceived to be the lack of a profound and cohesive theoretical structure moulding the fundamental principles and political expression of these two trends of thought. His major work, *The Theory of the Arab Revolution*, was codified in not a rare and original reflection of this perception.

Esmat Seif El-Dawla has generally been perceived as being close to Nasserism. Yet his persistent efforts to distinguish himself from this ideology, even though he personally considered that he belonged within its greater historical framework, brought harsh criticism upon himself and his disciples. In fact, it became common to classify advocates of opinions approximating his views as "Esmatists", as distinct from Nasserists. Nevertheless, broad sectors of Nasserists over the generations have persisted in reaffirming Seif El-Dawla's position within their movement, claiming him as one of the most important innovators of their philosophy. Up to his death, the debate over Esmat Seif El-Dawla's affiliation with the Nasserist school was not resolved. Nor does it appear that Seif El-Dawla himself, up to the time of his death, ever regretted the price that he and his disciples had to pay for trying to define themselves within the ideology to which he felt closest — the Nasserist school.

Esmat Seif El-Dawla's unceasing quest to differentiate his ideas from those of his contemporaries propelled him, ten years before his death, to engage in yet another of the steady stream of intellectual battles that characterised his life. In 1986 he published a book that provoked more uproar among his disciples than among his opponents. In *Arabism and Islam*, Seif El-Dawla applies his customary method of deconstructionist polemics to a re-examination of the theory and ambivalent relationship between Islam and pan-Arabism. He succeeded in arriving at a formula for positive interaction between pan-Arabism and Islam, founded upon a redefinition of the two concepts within a dialectical conceptual framework that abrogates any contradiction or conflict between the terms.

According to this conception, "Islam is an affiliation to a religion (a creed), whereas pan-Arabism is an affiliation to a nation with its two constituent elements, the land and its people, and the civilisation they have produced in conjunction over time. It is an affiliation to a historical condition, whereas religion constitutes an affiliation with the divine." The author found no conflict between belonging simultaneously to Islam and the Arab nation. Conversely, he found that Islam provided a driving force behind the pan-Arab movement. He submitted numerous hypotheses of the Islamic movement to profound and intense scrutiny. The Islamic *umma*, the Caliphate and the principles of Islamic thought derived from the *Shari'a*. On the basis of his investigations, he reformulated his previously known nationalist position, so as to integrate a number of Islamic notions.

Many, including some of his closest disciples, criticised Seif El-Dawla for departing from the fundamentals of pan-Arabism and moving toward political Islam, which they considered contradictory to pan-Arabism. Others went further to classify him alongside such Islamist thinkers as Tariq El-Bishri and Adel Hussein, who had departed from their nationalist and socialist commitments to embrace contemporary political Islam.

Both groups of critics, whether consciously or unconsciously, had probably established a link between the rise of the Islamist movements in the 1970s and the decline of pan-Arabism during the same period. To them, Seif El-Dawla's *Ummah* (formation of an independent opinion) uniting pan-Arabism and Islam constituted a recognition of the "defeat" of nationalist thought by the Islamist "tide". It may well be that Seif El-Dawla was fully aware of these dimensions. He refused to interpret the signs in the emotive terms of "defeat" or "withdrawal", however. Hence the force of his argumentation.

Throughout his career, Seif El-Dawla was known for his sharp and unyielding criticism, which many of his detractors held against him. Yet these detractors cannot deny the fact that he lived and died for a single ideal, which became synonymous with his very existence: the unity of the Arab nation. All his life, he dedicated his profuse and varied talents to the realisation of his ideal. His intellectual output was prolific, covering the full gamut of legal, political, ideological and historical fields. All his work provoked a great deal of interest and an even greater deal of controversy.

Two distinct traits characterised this late Arab nationalist thinker. The first was his commitment to linking thought with action. Not only was he a distinguished writer on nationalist issues, he was also a political activist who paid a heavy price for his position, including a ten-year term in prison in the 1970s. The second is his firm belief in "Arab youth", to whom he addressed virtually everything he wrote.

The departure of the great provocative thinker, Esmat Seif El-Dawla, persistent to the end in his confrontations and innovative ideas, leaves the arena of Arab nationalism virtually devoid of his sort of creative intellect.

The writer is an expert at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Municipal councils to be disbanded

Under a new draft law approved by the Shura Council, municipal council elections are to be delayed for nine months. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

The Shura Council has approved a new local (municipal) council election draft law. The new measure, in effect a recommendation that still requires the approval of the People's Assembly to become law, merely states that the elections are to be held "by direct secret ballot", and glosses over the issue of whether elections should be conducted according to the individual candidacy or state system.

New legislation on local councils became necessary following a Supreme Constitutional Court ruling in February that a 1979 law regulating their election and performance was unconstitutional. By sanctioning a combination of the state and individual candidacy systems, the court ruled, the old law discriminated against candidates unaffiliated to political parties. Under that system, candidates from the same political party within a council's electoral district were obliged to run on a single slate, or ticket. Each constituency had two seats; party candidates were allowed to run for both, while independents were restricted to one seat only.

During early, provisional discussions of the law in the Shura Council, a highly-placed government official, Mohamed Zaki Abu Amer, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, demanded that the new law should state clearly that the individual candidacy system would be used in the next elections. However, he later dropped this demand. However, Justice Minister Farouq Seif El-Nasr later confirmed that while Article 75 of the new draft merely stated that the elections should be conducted by "direct secret ballot", the individual candidacy system would in fact be used in the next elections, because it was the only remaining legal means of conducting an election.

Bowing to the Constitutional Court's ruling, the new draft dissolves all local councils nationwide and orders the setting up of government-appointed provisional councils to run municipal affairs until new elections are held, within a nine-month period.

According to Mahmoud Sherif, minister

of local administration, members of the provisional council would be chosen from those who have experience in municipal affairs, and would represent "various political trends". He described the provisional councils as "a necessity to fill the vacuum" caused by the disbanding of the existing councils. The new draft also regulates the setting up of future local councils in all villages, city districts, towns, cities and governorates, specifying the number of their members.

Mohamed Farag Mohamed, chairman of the Shura Council's legislative and constitutional committee, praised the government for complying with the Supreme Constitutional Court's ruling and presenting the new bill to the council. The articles of the new bill, he added, had been scrutinised to ensure that they were in line with the provisions of the constitution. In his opinion, the postponement of new council elections was a wise move. "Egypt has recently witnessed elections for the Shura Council and the People's Assembly," he said. "This is enough to postpone the local council elections, particularly since around 100,000 candidates are expected to take part."

Justice Minister Seif El-Nasr expressed the same view, and he too stressed the logistical problems that the organisation of new elections would engender. "At least 100,000 candidates are expected to contest the elections, competing for around 40,000 seats on 1,571 local councils," he said.

There was, however, some disagreement amongst Shura Council members during the debate. Talaat Mansour, who represents the southern province of El-Minya, suggested that instead of setting up provisional local councils, the already-existing councils should be retained until new elections were held. Other council members suggested that the elections should be organised as soon as possible.

The Shura Council is authorised only to debate draft legislation and make recommendations. It does not have any legislative authority — that is a monopoly of the People's Assembly.

Syndicates' battle not yet over

Dina Ezzat reviews the on-going three-way battle over the white collar unions

When members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood began taking over the councils of the engineers' and doctors' syndicates in the late 1980s, secularist intellectuals warned that other white-collar unions would be their next target.

The predictions soon became reality. In 1992, the Brotherhood, with its slogan "Islam is the solution", swept to a landslide victory in Bar Association elections, while government sympathisers fared miserably.

Islamists attributed their victories to their good name amongst professionals. "We won because the lawyers, like other professionals, want the affairs of their syndicate run by people whose hands are clean," claimed Islamist Khaled Badawi, assistant treasurer of the Bar Association.

But the government viewed the matter from a different perspective: in their view, the unions had been taken over by a small, but well-organised, Islamist minority because of the electoral apathy of a silent majority of non-Islamists.

It was not long before dissident voices began to make themselves heard. Charges of dictatorship, financial irregularities and Islamisation of the syndicates were made by engineers, doctors and lawyers. "They simply marginalised everybody else," remarked Tahani El-Gebali, a Nasserist member of the Bar Association's council. In view of this situation, El-Gebali said that non-Islamists had to "work harder to make sure that the Association does not lose its national character and become another forum for political Islam."

As complaints against the Islamists' administration of the unions mounted, and received prominent coverage in the press, the government decided to act. The first step was to pass a new law, in 1993, regulating syndicate elections. Under this law, a quorum of 50 per cent of the syndicate's membership was required for the elections to be valid. In the case of second-round run-offs, the quorum was reduced to 33 per cent.

Critics charged that the law had been pushed through the People's Assembly to thwart a possible takeover of other unions by the Islamists. But the government responded that the new law was aimed at encouraging professionals to take part in decision-making within their syndicates.

As Islamist domination of the unions continued, groups of anti-Islamist engineers and lawyers filed lawsuits, accusing their syndicates' councils of financial irregularities. As a result, the two unions were placed under judicial sequestration by court orders.

The Muslim Brotherhood alleged government interference. "The government cannot accept the popularity that the Islamists enjoy among the two million members of the professional unions," commented a Muslim Brotherhood member who asked that his name be withheld. This man, who is himself a member of a union council, added: "But we are not going to go away. We are determined to stay on. They [the government] deny us legitimacy. They have

blocked our attempt to become a political party and now they want us out of the syndicates. But no."

Egypt has 22 professional syndicates, with several of them acting as opposition platforms — both past and present. "These syndicates play a more vital political role than the 13 existing political parties," argued Amer Hashem, a researcher at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies. For one thing, he said, the electoral and organisational laws governing professional syndicates provide fewer constraints and allowed a wider margin of liberties than those by which the political parties have to play. "Even after the enforcement of the new professional syndicates law, the unions remained an attractive target for political forces to battle over," Hashem added.

Another reason for the political vitality of the syndicates is the high degree of political awareness among their memberships. And, unlike many political party members, syndicate members maintain a close association with their syndicates, which offer them services on a daily basis. Islamists have taken care to ensure that the members of the syndicates which they control are provided with a high level of services; subsidised health care; facilities to buy apartments; technical support. For the Islamists, these services have been the name of the game.

According to Hamdi El-Sayed, head of the Doctors' Syndicate, "the crisis between the government and the Islamists may be at the heart of the matter, but in fact it is the professional unions, which are a vital part of civil society, that are paying the price for this battle." El-Sayed argued that "when the Muslim Brotherhood turned the syndicates into political parties, it gave the government licence to view the unions as an opposition force with which it may collide at times and reach a reconciliation at other times."

Some professionals fear that the clampdown on the Brotherhood may be expanded to include other political activists in the syndicates. "We do not want to end the political role of the unions, for it is part and parcel of their vocation. We just want them to have a national, rather than an Islamist face," said El-Gebali.

Like many other liberals, El-Gebali and El-Sayed do not mind having the Islamists as part of a national front, "provided that they do not have control of this front at the back of their minds."

Meanwhile, the Islamists claim that the government is determined to eradicate their influence within the professional syndicates. "These sequestration orders are only another step in the series of extraordinary measures that the government is taking to stop the Islamist trend. And the government is not going to stop," said Mohamed Abdel-Qodous, secretary of the Lawyers' Committee at the Press Syndicate.

But according to the Doctors' Syndicate, El-Sayed: "the Brotherhood will not go away. They may have to change their tactics but they are not going to let go of the syndicates."

Israeli spy gets life sentence

Handing down a life sentence for spying for Israel, the presiding judge felt it was too lenient

The State Security Court at El-Arish, on Sinai's Mediterranean coast, sentenced Amer Salman, a Bedouin, to life imprisonment with hard labour on Sunday after convicting him of spying for Israel at the end of a two-day trial. Salman, from the border town of Rafah, was also fined LE10,000. Under Egyptian law, life imprisonment amounts to 25 years.

In passing sentence, presiding judge Ahmed Hafez Mashhour said he was imposing the maximum punishment allowed by state security law. He cited a provision stating that the passing of information to a foreign country with the aim of undermining Egypt's military, political, diplomatic or economic interests should be punished by life imprisonment with hard labour.

Another provision raises the punishment to death if the country to which the information is passed is in a state of war with Egypt. Egypt and Israel concluded a peace treaty in 1979. However, Mashhour seemed to consider the sentence currently allowed by law to be inadequate, and appealed to legislators to reconsider the provisions of the state security laws.

At the opening of the trial on Saturday, prosecutor Sherif Abdel-Nabi demanded the death penalty for the accused after charging him with gathering information about Egyptian military movements in Sinai and passing it on to an Israeli intelligence officer.

Salman, who worked as a porter at a Rafah school, was arrested at the beginning of 1993 after confessing that he had worked as an agent for Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, for the previous 11 years. But his case came to public attention only last January when Prosecutor-General Faghi El-Arabi decided that he should be put on trial.

Salman, 51, told investigators that he was recruited by the Israelis after being caught red-handed stealing two refrigerators from the Israeli settlement of Yamit in February 1982, before it was dismantled under the terms of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.

Salman admitted that he had visited the Israeli town of BeerSheva on several occasions for instruction on gathering information about Egyptian military movements in Sinai — particularly in military zones B and C, where heavy weaponry is either restricted or prohibited by the peace treaty. He was also taken to an Israeli army camp near Tel Aviv, where he was trained in identifying heavy tanks in the Egyptian arsenal.

In return, Salman was paid a monthly stipend of LE300 and given occasional financial bonuses. He was also reported to have been provided with 12 kilograms of heroin, with a street value of \$12 million. Salman was arrested after he attempted to recruit two other Sinai Bedouins, reportedly in return for heroin. But the two turned him down and tipped off Egyptian authorities about his activities.



Pope Shenouda III, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, officiates at an Easter Eve midnight mass Saturday at St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo

How responsible is a chief editor?

An appeals court has taken issue with a Penal Code provision that holds a newspaper's editor-in-chief responsible for any publication offence committed by his reporters. Shaden Shehab reports

An article in the Penal Code that holds the editor-in-chief responsible for any publication offence that appears in his newspaper has been referred to the Supreme Constitutional Court for a ruling on its legality.

The decision was taken by the Miscellaneous Appeals Court of Qasr El-Nil in response to a motion filed by Mahmoud El-Tohami, chief editor of the weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef*.

El-Tohami had been sentenced to two years imprisonment by a lower court, which had found him guilty of libel for publishing a story about money laundering. The story provided information about the fortunes of what the magazine described as "the drug barons". One of them, currently serving time behind bars, took El-Tohami to court.

El-Tohami appealed the sentence. The appeals court, expressing misgivings about the legality of Article 195 of the Penal Code, which holds the chief editor accountable for all stories that appear in his publication, decided to refer it to the Supreme Constitutional Court.

As legal experts pointed out, Article 195 is not part of the controversial Law 93 for 1995, which deals with publication offences. However, the article gained notoriety because Law 93 penalised some publication offences with imprisonment. A new press law, currently being debated by the Shura Council before being referred to the People's Assembly, drops the editor-in-chief's responsibility for all stories appearing in his newspaper. However, this has angered some reporters who argue that their work is often re-written, and new information sometimes added, by the chief editor.

Counsellor Yehia El-Rifai, former chairman of the judges' club, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Article 195 of the Penal Code is "definitely unconstitutional". He explained that "under the Constitution, you cannot punish a person for an offence which he did not commit," and was confident that the Constitutional Court would support his viewpoint.

Asked whether this provision would be automatically invalidated if the new press law was passed, Rifai replied that the new law should state in clear-cut terms that Article 195 had been cancelled.

Chief editors reacted with relief to the appeal court's decision to refer the matter to the Constitutional Court. Magdi Hussein, editor-in-chief of *Al-Shaab*, mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, said: "Holding the chief editor responsible for every word that appears in his newspaper is simply illogical. It is an impossible responsibility." Hussein had been sentenced to one year's imprisonment, also for libel, but has filed an appeal.

Mustafa Bakri, chief editor of *Al-Ahram*, who is facing 27 libel cases, agreed with Hussein. "Chief editors are spending a precious part of their time going to court for articles they did not write," he said. "How am I supposed to have the time to read the entire newspaper on a daily basis? The cancellation of Article 195 will force reporters to make greater efforts to verify their stories."

In Bakri's view, "chief editors should be held responsible only for what they write. This is only fair."

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Tantawi reaffirms liberal view

After serving for 10 years as the mufti of the republic, Mohamed Sayed Tantawi was appointed on 27 March as the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mosque. During his tenure as mufti, Tantawi, 68, advanced a liberal interpretation of Islam that was applauded by some but opposed by others, mainly conservative scholars at the 1,000-year-old Al-Azhar. In the following interview with **Amira Howaidy**, Sheikh Tantawi spells out his position on several controversial issues, making it clear that he will continue to uphold his liberal views.

After your appointment as sheikh of Al-Azhar, you were quoted as saying that you would feel able to retract some of your previous *fatwas* [religious rulings], provided you were shown evidence from the Qur'an and the *Sunna* [the Prophet Mohamed's teachings] that was stronger than the evidence you already had. Were you referring to any *fatwas* in particular? No, I was not referring to certain *fatwas* in particular. This is a general rule which I uphold. A true Muslim should not be stubborn, but should follow the truth once he establishes that it is the truth.

Our master, God's Prophet, provided us with a good example in this connection. He would order his companions to do certain things or refrain from doing certain things because it was necessary under the circumstances prevailing at the time. But once these circumstances no longer existed, the order would be dropped.

But in a recent press interview, you condoned female genital mutilation, although you had stated previously that the religious texts favouring this practice were too weak? I still stand by the official *fatwa* published in the 23rd volume of *fatwas* passed by *Dar El-Efta'a* [the Mufti's office], in which I stated clearly that female genital mutilation is a custom that has nothing to do with worship. All the *hadiths* [Prophet's sayings] that deal with female genital mutilation are weak [weakly sourced] and should not be relied upon.

This is not only my opinion, but also that of other *imams*, such as Imam El-Shawkani and Sheikh Sayed Sabiq, who discusses the matter in his book, *Sunni Jurisprudence*.

You are also said to have changed your position on the issue of visiting Jerusalem. While you were previously reported as being willing to visit the city if invited by Yasser Arafat, more recent reports quote you as saying that you would not visit Jerusalem until its liberation. What is your position exactly? I still say that if I receive an invitation from President Yasser Arafat to visit Jerusalem and offer prayers at Al-Aqsa Mosque, I will welcome this invitation, as long as the conditions allow it.

Are these conditions related to the liberation of Jerusalem? No, they are not related to that, because we are talking from a religious, not a political, perspective.

Do you agree with the statement issued by Al-Azhar Ulama [Islamic scholars] Committee describing the suicide bombers who killed Israeli civilians as "the best of martyrs" because Israel is a *Dar Harb* [bat-



photo: Aref Saadeddin

'Everybody has the right to speak his mind. We don't gag people. But I repeat that I cannot equate someone who blows himself up to kill enemies who have declared war on us, with someone who blows himself up to kill Muslims, non-Muslims, children and women'

field)? No, I do not approve of this statement. My position is that anybody who blows himself up on a battlefield to defend his religion, his country or his honour is a martyr. But I cannot equate a man who blows himself up to kill enemies who have declared war on Islam with someone who blows himself up, killing children, women, Muslims and non-Muslims in the process. My words in this connection are as clear as the sun.

The Ulama's statement was interpreted as marking the beginning of

disension within Al-Azhar. Everybody has the right to speak his mind. We don't gag people. But I repeat that I cannot equate someone who blows himself up to kill enemies who have declared war on us with someone who blows himself up to kill Muslims, non-Muslims, children and women. The Holy Qur'an exhorts us to "fight in God's cause, those who fight you". Please underline the words "those who fight you". It also exhorts us "not to commit aggression because God does not love the aggressors".

In previous interviews, you stated that

the interest of the nation is determined by the political authorities. To what extent are your *fatwas* linked to those political authorities? By the nation's interest. I mean its political and social interest. When it comes to religious interest, the word of scholars and theologians comes first.

You stated in the past that *Dar El-Efta'a* should be the sole authority issuing *fatwas*. Is this position related to the apparent contradiction between some *fatwas* issued by *Dar El-Efta'a* and others issued by Al-Azhar over the past few years?

My position is that *Dar El-Efta'a* is the official body for issuing *fatwas*. But this should not prevent any scholar from issuing *fatwas* within the limits of his specialisation and knowledge, and provided he bears responsibility for what he says. But the only official quarter for issuing *fatwas* in Egypt is *Dar El-Efta'a*, which is over 100 years old.

Is this position related to your past experience as mufti? No, this has nothing to do with being mufti or a professor at Al-Azhar University. I am for truth and giving each person his due, and against grabbing [the

authority of others]. With all sincerity, I say that the mufti's word regarding what is *halal* [religiously acceptable] and what is *haram* [sinful] comes ahead of the word of the sheikh of Al-Azhar.

But the word of the sheikh of Al-Azhar comes ahead of the mufti's word regarding Azharite institutes. And the word of the minister of Al-Awqaf [religious endowments] concerning Al-Da'wa [propagation of Islam] comes ahead of the words of both the mufti and the sheikh of Al-Azhar.

So what will be the fate of Al-Azhar's *Fatwa* Committee?

The *Fatwa* Committee will continue to issue *fatwas*. If these *fatwas* are correct, we will support them, but if they are not, we will respond to them.

The same applies to *Dar El-Efta'a*. If it issues correct *fatwas*, we will support them, otherwise we will urge it to reconsider. But I repeat that *Dar El-Efta'a* is the only official body authorised to issue *fatwas*.

Shortly before your appointment as the sheikh of Al-Azhar, you were quoted as saying that the trial of Dr Nasser Hamed Abu-Zeid should not be conducted in his absence, but that he should be summoned for a discussion of his ideas. Is this true?

What you have just said is 100 per cent untrue. I have never addressed the issue of Nasser Hamed Abu-Zeid in any way. It is the custom of theologians, *Dar El-Efta'a* and Al-Azhar not to comment on cases that are being considered by the judiciary, leaving it for the courts to have their say. It is only when the judiciary requests the opinion of the mufti or the sheikh of Al-Azhar that he has to provide it.

Does this mean that the judiciary did not seek your opinion in the case of Nasser Hamed Abu-Zeid?

If the judiciary refers a jurisprudential matter to us, then we are under an obligation to respond.

Should we expect major changes at Al-Azhar following your appointment?

Life is in a continual process of development. Thanks be to God, Al-Azhar is over 1,000 years old and, thanks be to God, it has always been developing. If I and the brothers who cooperate with me find that some of the curricula or administrative regulations need to be modified to serve religion, knowledge and the public interest, then we will make those modifications.

But I should add that I did not come to Al-Azhar with the intention of making changes. If I and my brothers find that something needs to be changed, then we will change it; if we decide that other things should be retained, then we will retain them.

According to the 1961 law on Al-Azhar's affairs, the curricula of Al-Azhar educational institutes should be reviewed every four years, but this has never been done. Will it be done now?

I am devoting a great deal of attention to this matter. Books which are included in the curricula of Al-Azhar students in the primary, preparatory and secondary stages will be scrutinised meticulously by me and by specialised committees. What needs to be developed will be developed, what needs to be modified will be modified and what should remain unchanged will remain unchanged.

Support for Egyptian expats

The remittances of Egyptian expatriates working in the oil-rich Arab Gulf states is one of the nation's major, if not its top, hard currency earner. The expatriates' presence is also perceived as a means of promoting Arab interaction at the grassroots level. However, despite the benefits, many Egyptians complain of financial and social mistreatment abroad.

To help them cope with these problems, the Foreign Ministry is setting up a General Authority for the Care of Egyptian Expatriates. "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is always looking at ways to improve the conditions under which manpower is exported to the Gulf states," said Mustafa Abdel-Aziz, foreign under-secretary for expatriate affairs. "It was because of the ministry's concern to give due attention to this matter that we decided to establish the new authority," added Abdel-Aziz, who had just returned from a Gulf tour.

Affiliated to the Foreign Ministry, the new authority will coordinate with the Ministry of Manpower and Emigration as well as Egyptian embassies and consulates abroad. Its principal task, according to Abdel-Aziz, will be to provide expatriates with social and legal services. A plan outlining the structure and mandate of the authority has been prepared by the Foreign Ministry and will be submitted soon to the cabinet, and then to the People's Assembly, for approval.

The hardships faced by Zein El-Abidin Ibrahim, who tried his hand at various jobs in several Gulf states for a period of over 15 years, demonstrate the problems the new authority will have to contend with.

Ibrahim decided to travel to the Gulf to make his fortune in the mid-1970s — a time of economic liberalisation in Egypt and an oil boom in the Gulf states. A chance contact with a visitor from the Gulf got him a job, and he travelled without any assistance from the Egyptian authorities or trade unions. "Things were fine," said Ibrahim. "The employer was a very good man. He gave me a decent salary and was good to me. But unfortunately, he died two years later."

Ibrahim managed to get himself another job without assistance. But things this time things did not work out so well. "My salary came late and was not paid in full," he said. He travelled to another Gulf state where "things were OK. I had no problems during the 10 years I spent there."

Over two million Egyptians are working in the oil-rich Arab Gulf states. To help them cope with the problems they encounter there, the Foreign Ministry is setting up a special authority Dina Ezzat reports

An ex-army man himself, Ibrahim takes great pride in having participated in fueling the jet-fighters that took part in the 1991 Kuwait liberation war. And, when the dust of war had settled, Ibrahim returned to Egypt to enrol three of his four sons in universities. Bureaucratic problems delayed his return to his job. As a result, he received a letter telling him that he had been fired. He was disappointed, "but I told myself that it was the will of God that I return to my country and start a small project with the little savings I had."

But in order to do so, Ibrahim had to go back to the Gulf to collect his financial dues, which his employer had refused to transfer to Cairo. "I am talking about the equivalent of LE84,000. For me, this is a fortune."

It took Ibrahim two years and a great deal of support from the Foreign Ministry to obtain a visitor's visa. But he nevertheless failed to collect all his money. "I got no more than LE24,000," he said. Bitter about his financial loss, Ibrahim also complained about "bad treatment" from his former employers.

According to Ibrahim, his problems were not only the result of the irregularities committed by his employer, but also the "reluctance of the concerned Egyptian bodies to provide a good framework of guarantees for expatriate workers."

Senior government officials have repeatedly affirmed that the sweeping majority of the over two million Egyptians working in the Gulf states are well-treated. They warn that engaging in intensive debates on "the problems faced by a few cases here or a few cases there" is not in the best interest of the majority, nor of good relations between Egypt and her sister-states in the Gulf.

"But this is not to say that the state does not pay attention to the interests of Egyptians working overseas," asserted Abdel-Aziz. "The working and social conditions of Egyptian expatriates is

always on the agenda of bilateral talks between Egypt and those countries."

In another response to the increase in expatriates' complaints, the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) recently organised a workshop to discuss ways of improving conditions.

Two major problems were underlined: the lack of a state-sponsored framework for the export of manpower, and the inability of Arab white- and blue-collar unions to effectively implement the provisions of existing labour treaties.

"It is one and the same problem," commented Ahmed Thabet, assistant professor of political science at Cairo University. According to a paper he submitted to the workshop, "the influx of Egyptian manpower to the Arab oil countries, in most cases, has been organised, and continues to be organised, on the basis of personal contacts. Although the government is aware that expatriate manpower is a principal source of national revenue, it has failed to devote adequate attention to the organisational aspect of this influx."

The situation is compounded by the fact that international labour treaties protecting expatriate manpower against all forms of financial or social abuse are rarely enforced. And discussions at the workshop revealed that many Arab states that import Egyptian manpower, in addition to less economically privileged countries, have not actually signed Arab manpower-protection treaties.

According to Under-Secretary Abdel-Aziz, Egyptian embassies and consulates are doing their best to help expatriates. Their efforts, however, are undermined by occasional staff shortages. "We have already started to deal with this and are training the best teams we have, before posting them to countries with large Egyptian communities, such as the Gulf states," he said.

"But we must remember that the larger the Egyptian community, the more problems it is likely to encounter," he warned. "It is all proportional."

Abdel-Aziz made a tour of eight Gulf cities between 22 March and 7 April, as head of an official delegation including representatives from the ministries of education, interior, manpower and emigration, the investment authority and the business sector. The aim was to address the general concerns of Egyptian communities, including the problems of getting work permits, paying taxes and starting enterprises in Egypt.

A 40 million pound question

An out-of-court settlement between a public sector company and a Lebanese businessman has raised question marks about the spending of state funds. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** investigates

Reports that Lebanese businessman Abdallah Al-Jammal was paid LE40 million by a public sector company to settle an 11-year-old dispute have triggered controversy on the pages of the local press and brought the issue of the wasting of state funds into the limelight.

The controversy is sooo to spill over into the People's Assembly, where MP El-Sharkawi Tarek El-Guindi has submitted a question to Aref Ebeid, minister of the public business sector, about the out-of-court settlement between Al-Jammal and the Egyptian Company of Tourism and Hotels (EGOTH). The latter is affiliated to the Holding Company of Housing, Tourism and Cinema — one of 17 holding companies supervised by Ebeid.

The story dates back to 1977, when EGOTH and Al-Jammal signed a contract to build a tourist complex on an area of 8,000 square metres, owned by EGOTH, in Tahrir Square in the heart of Cairo. According to El-Guindi, the land was sold to Al-Jammal at a low price, about LE2 million, on the condition that it would be sold back to EGOTH at the same price if the joint venture did not materialise. Under the contract, Al-Jammal was to contribute about LE2.5 million, half of the joint venture's capital, El-Guindi added.

Although the tourist complex was never built, Al-Jammal did not return the land to EGOTH, forcing it to take legal action against him in 1985. The lawsuit dragged on for years. But EGOTH's board of directors met last December, 24 days before a final verdict was due to be handed down, and decided to finalise an out-of-court settlement with Al-Jammal, paying him LE40 million to regain the land. According to reports in the Arabic-language press, the company took this decision despite the fact that in all probability the court's ruling would have been in its favour.

One board member, Abdel-Hamid Farghali, objected to the decision, arguing that Al-Jammal "was given money which he had not paid in the first place". But other board members justified the out-of-court settlement on the grounds that the court might have ordered EGOTH to pay Al-Jammal an even higher amount in compensation.

However, El-Guindi maintains that a report by experts assigned by the court to examine the dispute was in EGOTH's favour. After submitting the question to Ebeid, El-Guindi told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "The people, who are paying millions of pounds in taxes, have to

know how their money is being spent."

Ebeid is expected to appear before a parliamentary committee in the near future "to clear the dust surrounding this case", a parliamentary source said.

Responding to the press campaign, EGOTH published an advertisement disputing El-Guindi's claims and the sums he mentioned. The company, it said, had documents proving that Al-Jammal had paid \$7.5 million, a sum representing 50 per cent of the capital of the Tahrir Square joint venture and 50 per cent of the capital for another venture, planned for the northern coast, which also never materialised. According to the advertisement, Al-Jammal also paid an additional \$4.5 million following a decision to increase the capital of the two ventures. Moreover, EGOTH had recovered the sum of LE11.4 million, which had been placed in banks as deposits, as well as the land in Tahrir Square and along the northern coast.

Ebeid, in a published statement, said Al-Jammal had paid \$3.8 million as a contribution to the capital of the Tahrir Square joint venture as well as \$3.4 million for the north coast venture. In 1984, after EGOTH took legal action against him, Al-Jammal suggested an out-of-court settlement, under which he would be paid back his money plus 5 per cent annual interest. EGOTH agreed to re-inburse Al-Jammal with LE31.9 million, which is the money he had originally paid, plus 20 per cent interest, Ebeid said. He did not explain, however, why this amount was later raised to LE40 million.

Moreover, an insurance company has offered LE117.5 million to buy the Tahrir Square land from EGOTH, which, according to Ebeid, "meant that finalising the out-of-court settlement would assure EGOTH of a net and immediate profit amounting to LE 77.5 million." And, he added, the recovery of the northern coast land meant an additional LE300 million for EGOTH.

Al-Jammal is a business tycoon who launched several ventures in Egypt under the late President Anwar El-Sadat's economic open door policy in the 1970s. One of his ventures was Al-Jammal Trust Bank, which was placed under sequestration in 1984 for involvement in shady financial practices.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

The PNA versus the PNC

A few days ahead of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) meeting scheduled for 22 April, there are strong indications that the president of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and key figures of the PLO's Palestinian National Council (PNC) are growing further apart.

The latest row was brought to the fore by media reports saying that the PNC will convene to rescind articles in the Palestinian National Covenant, in effect the constitution, which are objectionable to Israel. The 1995 Taba agreement signed by Yasser Arafat requires that changes to the covenant be approved by the PNC two months after the inauguration of the elected self-rule council. As the council was inaugurated on 7 March the deadline is 7 May.

Obstacles appeared even before the debate began on rescinding the articles calling for the dismantling of the Israeli Zionist state. One obvious sticking point is the venue of the meeting and a second is Arafat's disregard for the traditional procedure of meetings being called only after consultation with PLO and PNC key figures. Arafat unilaterally instructed the acting president of the PNC to issue an invitation to a meeting to be held on 22 April in Gaza.

It is still uncertain whether the long-awaited meeting will take place in Gaza, which remains effectively under Israeli sovereignty. Salim Zaanoun, acting president of the PNC, announced on Tuesday that Israel had still not authorised 50 PNC members abroad to enter the self-rule areas, adding that unless this happens by tomorrow the meeting cannot take place in Gaza. Israel had previously announced that all members would be allowed to return.

Several prominent PNC members expressed a preference for the Arab League's headquarters in Cairo as an alternative venue, followed by Amman, based on the conviction that the Palestinian question is an intrinsically pan-Arab issue that must be decided upon in indisputably Arab-controlled territories.

Farouq Qaddoumi, head of the PLO's political department and PLO foreign minister, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that contrary to PLO practice, the announcement for the meeting was released before PNC members received official invitations. Immediately after the announcement was made to the press, Qaddoumi, who has remained in Tunis refusing to enter the self-rule areas, sent a letter to the acting president of the PNC, Salim Zaanoun, berating the presumption of Arafat's call, a full text of which is published below. In a conciliatory gesture, Arafat flew to Tunis last Monday to meet with Qaddoumi, who told the *Weekly* on Wednesday, while in Cairo to attend an extraordinary Arab League session, that his meeting with Arafat did not change his position expressed in the interview with the *Weekly* conducted earlier this week.

Qaddoumi described the meeting's announcement, released to the media by Zaanoun last week as a publicity stunt. "I am opposed to holding a meeting inside [Gaza] under current conditions which are not conducive to a free and balanced discussion. How can PNC members openly express their opinion in the strained atmosphere prevailing in the Occupied Territories?" he said.

Qaddoumi further explained that the covenant cannot be revoked at an ordinary PNC meeting. Only an emergency meeting is empowered to discuss the amendment of the covenant.

Rescinding certain articles in the covenant has become a prime concern inside Israel following the

Arafat's hastened call to amend the Palestinian Covenant unleashed a furious response among PLO veterans, reports Samia Nkrumah

January Palestinian self-rule elections. Though many Palestinians would agree that the covenant is outdated, they now perceive Israel's insistence as humiliating. Obtaining Israel's authorisation is in itself a humiliating blow to PNC members abroad. "Isn't it pathetic that we need Israel's approval to set foot on our land?" commented Qaddoumi.

Another objection to holding the meeting in Gaza is that it implies a recognition of the status quo and an acceptance of the conditions laid down by the Israeli government. "Our rejection of the Oslo agreements is reinforced after the interim period proved a failure. The Israeli government has recently demonstrated that it has no peaceful intentions," Qaddoumi added.

Ahmed Sidki Al-Dajani, a leading PNC member resident in Cairo, pointed out that the safety of PNC members is not even guaranteed if they return. "The Israeli forces control the crossings into the Occupied Territories," he said. "Their decision supercedes that of the Palestinian police. Hidden behind screens, they watch passers-by and stop them at will. This is a humiliating experience for us. And after all this, we will only be given a temporary stay."

But the controversial articles in the covenant are not the only items on the agenda in the Palestinian political arena at present. With the spectre of a Palestinian crisis chipping away at his authority's credibility, Arafat is determined to push for a national dialogue. Arafat is also trying to seek approval during the next PNC meeting for his choice of cabinet members from the PNC. "How can we talk of a serious national dialogue when hundreds of leaders of political forces are in jail?" countered Abdel-Jawad Saleh, a PNC member and member of the elected self-rule council for the constituency of Ramallah.

Salim Zaanoun said last year that amending the covenant would not be discussed before the final status of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, which are

scheduled to open on 4 May. Subsequent events belied his words as the interim agreement is far from being implemented and, in some cases, has been breached. Israel's closure of Palestinian territories continues; 37 powers have yet to be transferred to the PNA; more settlements have been established and more Arab land has been confiscated. And Israeli withdrawal from Hebron, originally scheduled for 28 March, is being delayed. In the meantime, there are reports about PLO Executive Committee members and Israeli legal officials contacting each other to agree on the text of the amendment.

Many also believe that revising the covenant is the wrong move to take and that its only purpose, from an Israeli standpoint, is to bolster Peres' popularity before the Israeli elections next month. Another option is to draw up a new covenant, rather than amend the old one.

Qaddoumi pointed out that the PNC's 1988 Algiers declaration of independence recognised Israel's right to exist and the right of the Palestinians to establish a state of their own. "The Algiers declaration was based on a recognition of two states: an Israeli and a Palestinian state," he said. "The covenant's amendment is a compromise procedure. Israel's insistence is simply its way of forcing the Palestinian people to capitulate."

Haider Abdel-Shafie, member of the elected self-rule council for the constituency of Gaza, as well as a PNC member, said: "In principle, I do not see the need to accommodate Israel in any respect while Israel is violating Palestinian rights. Israel has made clear what it is prepared to concede. Whether the covenant is amended or not will not make much of a difference."

Irrespective of the outcome of the debate on the covenant, the ongoing dispute has placed the crisis of Palestinian national action in the spotlight. The duplication in the institutional structure of the movement has become apparent to all. "Now the PLO institutions are in a state of partial paralysis. The PNC must remain independent of the PNA inside the Occupied Territories. Similarly, the PLO Executive Committee, which guarantees the national rights of our people enshrined in the constitution, and the head of the PNA must remain separate for the safety of both the PNA and the PLO," Dajani suggested.

A translation of the full text of the letter sent by Farouq Qaddoumi to Salim Zaanoun

Brother Abdul-Adib, acting president of the PNC

Greetings,
It was published in the daily press that an urgent invitation to a Palestinian National Council (PNC) meeting has been issued and that the meeting will take place inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories on 22 April 1996.

It has always been the custom that any invitation for a new session of the PNC only takes place after intensive consultations amongst all the leaders and prominent figures of the Palestinian national movement, to discuss all the developments on the Palestinian scene since the previous round of PNC meetings. Also [it has been the custom] that such consultations be followed by a number of consecutive meetings of the Executive Committee of the PLO, with its quorum of 12, in which the PNC secretariat meets with the Executive Committee to ratify the invitation for a new session of PNC meetings.

If that was the case in normal circumstances, then surely it should be the case today when the Palestinian arena is witnessing daily new and decisive events and developments bearing on all aspects of the Palestinian question and its fundamental pillars and threatening the most serious repercussions. The Palestinian-Israeli agreements have been the focus of controversy amongst the various Palestinian national forces.

The controversy aside, Israel has contravened and reneged on the spirit and text of these agreements, thus marginalising Palestinian national action, dealing it from all set rules for a political settlement enshrined in the principles of the Madrid peace conference.

The Palestinian cause, now more than at any other time, needs a wide national Palestinian consensus, inter-Arab cooperation and more understanding and support from the international parties if the peace process is to be salvaged and the Palestinian cause is to be saved from all attempts to liquidate it.

May God provide us with guidance. *Abul-Loatif (Farouq Qaddoumi) 16 April 1996*

Israel's Turkish foothold

The recent Turkish-Israeli military alliance will further America's policy of containing Iran, Iraq and, to a lesser degree, Syria, writes Khaled El-Sergani

Israeli military planes have conducted exercises in Turkish airspace in the first active implementation of a military cooperation agreement concluded between Turkey and Israel on 18 February.

The agreement provides for intensive cooperation between the air forces of the two countries, allowing Israeli planes to use air bases in Turkey to conduct training exercises and joint manoeuvres. The agreement also establishes a security forum for strategic dialogue between the two countries, including cooperation in the activities of their respective intelligence agencies.

Specifically, Israel would be granted facilities in Turkey to establish electronic surveillance devices which could be used to monitor military activities in Syria and Iraq. These facilities could also be at the disposal of the Turkish army in its struggle against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in southeast Anatolia and northern Iraq.

It is evident that the agreement represents more than just a response to Israel's desire for greater latitude in air operations. Rather, it is the latest piece in a series of joint Turkish-Israeli military initiatives that have only recently become evident. These initiatives have included a \$600 million contract between Turkey and the Israeli military industry which will upgrade Turkey's American-made air force equipment. The Israeli firms won the deal despite intense competition from American and European firms. A military supply agreement worth \$50 million has also been reached between the two countries, which will give the Turkish air force access to certain weapons in Israel's arsenal, including advanced air-to-ground Popeye missiles, with a range of over 500 km.

The new agreement is likely to benefit Israel more than Turkey. Turkey will receive information on the movements of the PKK. The Israeli air force, however, will for the first time be able to station aircraft at Turkish bases and to use these bases to launch training, reconnaissance and, if necessary, combat missions.

The new Turkish-Israeli strategic alliance also represents a radical shift in Turkey's policy toward the Middle East. After the establishment of the state of Israel, Turkey maintained an even-handed policy towards both Israel and the Arabs. This policy of "constructive neutrality" was founded upon four essential principles, outlined in an official Foreign Ministry publication. These were to provide political support for the Arab cause, to maintain neutrality in inter-Arab conflicts, to pursue a low-key policy toward Israel and to seek closer economic and technical cooperation with the Arab countries.

Accordingly, Turkey supported Arab-based initiatives in the UN General Assembly, including the 1975 resolution condemning Zionism as a form of racism. In January of the same year, it recognised the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, in spite of the damage this caused to its relations with Jordan, Turkey's traditional ally in the region. Then, in October 1979, the Turkish government permitted the PLO to open a representation office in Ankara. Six months later, it lodged a vehement protest against Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem and recalled its chargé d'affaires from Tel Aviv.

Turkey was the first nation in the so-called

Western camp and the 11th nation in the world to recognise the state of Palestine when it was declared by the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in 1988. At the same time, the PNC accepted UN Resolution 242, declared its condemnation of terrorism and implicitly recognised the state of Israel.

Behind Turkey's shift toward the Arabs and away from Israel during this period was the rise in the price of oil and the desire to establish economic and commercial relations with the Arab petroleum-exporting countries.

It is true that, on occasion, particularly during the Cold War, Turkey deviated from the central principles of its Middle Eastern policy. In so doing, it was yielding to NATO pressures to pursue a policy of containment towards the Soviet Union. However, at no juncture did it seek any form of pact with Israel that was so clearly prejudicial to neighbouring Arab countries.

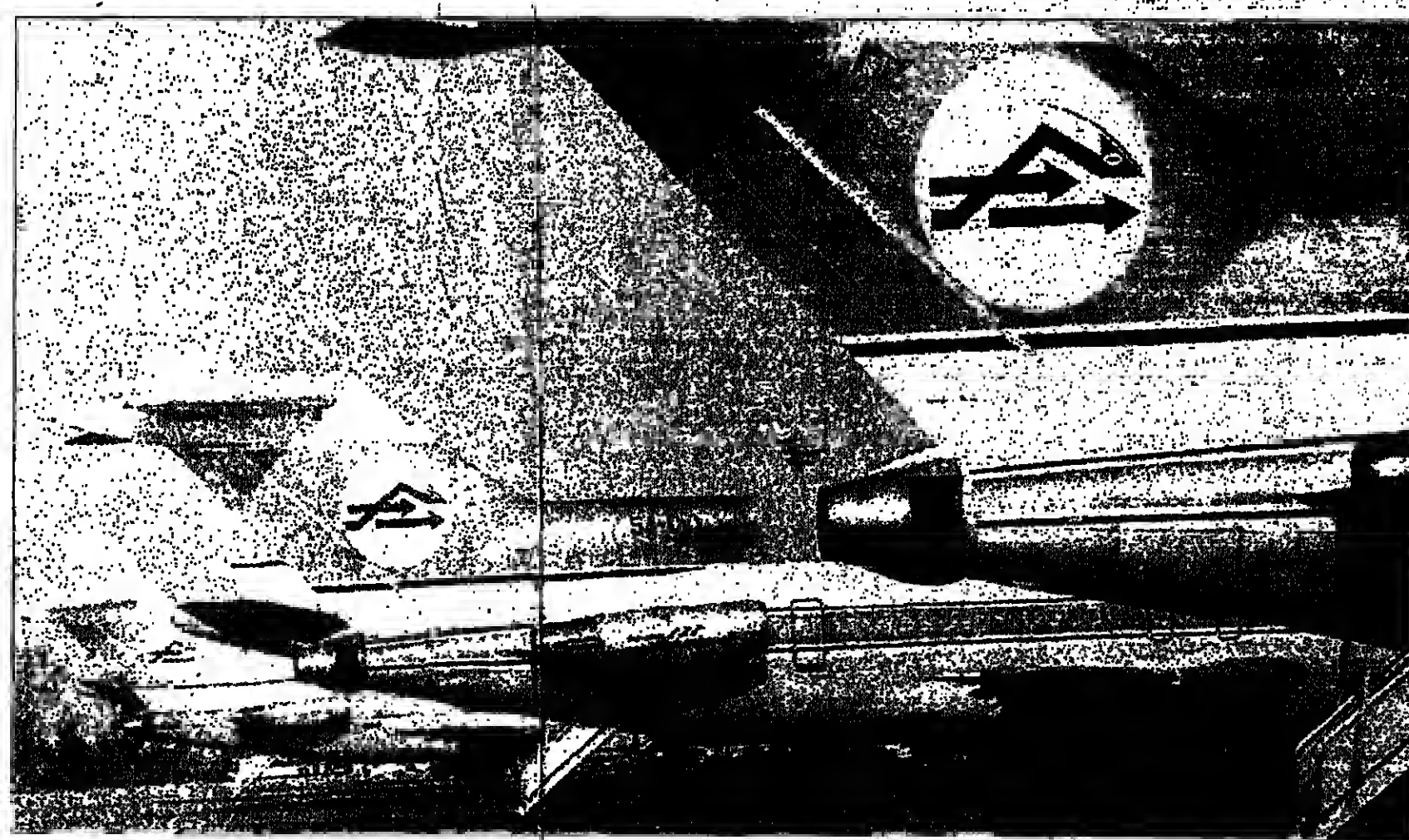
The purpose of the recent alliance is to implement America's policy of "dual containment" against Iran and Iraq and to compound pressures on Syria, which, in its negotiations with Israel, has consistently adhered to the principle of land for peace. By concluding the recent pact with Israel, Turkey has completely subordinated its policies to Israeli objectives.

One motive behind Turkey's decision to conclude this alliance with Israel may be access to Israel's influence with the United States. Perhaps Turkey hopes that America will alter its stance on the conflict between Turkey and Greece. In recent developments in the conflict, the US has been more supportive of Greece.

It has been suggested that Turkey's policy towards Israel is influenced by certain salient factors, one of which is the potential for the powerful Jewish lobby in the US to help Turkey. This lobby, as everyone knows, is controlled by Israel. Influential Jewish circles in the US were able to divert American policy from unqualified support for Greece. They suggested, at Israel's prompting, that support for a resolution condemning the mass killing of Armenians in the early 20th century, which was put before the Senate in February 1990, could harm Israeli-Turkish relations. The proposed resolution was aborted, prompting a highly placed Turkish official to declare his country's gratitude to Israel.

Turkey's contention that its alliance with Israel was a response to the security agreement signed recently between Syria and Greece is very feeble. By no stretch of the imagination does the agreement between Syria and Greece offer Greece the advantages Turkey has conferred upon Israel. Moreover, the Israeli-Turkish pact could well propel Syria to seek closer military cooperation with Greece, which would be detrimental to Turkey's national security interests and would augment the tensions in the region as a whole.

Nor should Turkey feel assured that its relations with the Arab world are on such a sure footing. The fact that Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres was received in Oman and Qatar does not necessarily signal the end of hostility between the Arabs and Israel. Syria is still technically in a state of war with Israel. As the primary victim of the Turkish-Israeli alliance, Syria is capable of rallying the support of other Arab countries against Turkey's current policy.



Libya is isolated by a UN air embargo for failing to hand over two men accused of bombing a PanAm airliner over Scotland in 1988 (photo: AP)

US targets Libya, again

Are US accusations about Libya's chemical weapons programme part of an organised campaign against the Libyan regime, asks Rasha Saad

Earlier this month US Defence Secretary William Perry announced after a meeting with President Hosni Mubarak that the US had "irrefutable evidence" that Libya had an extensive programme to develop a chemical weapons production facility. Perry also announced that the US would not rule out military action to prevent Tripoli from opening such a plant should diplomatic efforts fail to persuade Libya to drop the programme.

Perry's visit came shortly after a CIA official testified before the US Congress that the underground site which Libya was constructing at Tarhuna would be the world's largest chemical weapons plant.

Egypt's position was clarified a few days later when President Mubarak asserted that there was no evidence to back Perry's accusations. Egypt pledged to do its utmost to avoid a situation where the US would resort to military action against Libya.

Abdel-Sami'a Zeineddin, former head of the Sudanese department at the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, commended the Egyptian stance. "Egypt will not be a springboard for the US," he said.

During the last two weeks, official Libyan presence in Egypt intensified in order to discuss the US accusations. At a press conference held in Cairo, Libyan Foreign Minister Omar Al-

Montasser strongly denied the US allegations, saying that they are based on false information. He attributed the US campaign against Libya to the latter's tough resistance to US hegemony in the Arab world. Al-Montasser criticised the US for its hostile stance against Libya and its lack of concern for Arab security. "The US did not even bother to clarify the situation concerning the Israeli Dimona nuclear reactor," he said.

During the last few weeks, Egypt has expressed its concern over Israeli press reports indicating that there has been a leakage from the Dimona reactor, located near the Egyptian-Israeli border, as a result of recent earthquakes. US officials responded by claiming that the US does not exclude Israel from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. However, they added that as soon as regional peace is realised, the US will look into the issue of Israel's nuclear capability.

Commenting on this position, Omar Al-

Montasser told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that American statements confirm "US double standards. The US deals with each issue in a different way though the same principles should be applied to all countries."

In fact, some political observers believe that the US timed the recent accusations against Libya in order to divert attention from the Israeli reactor's leakage reports and thus indirectly gave Israel an excuse to retain its nuclear power.

Egyptian political columnists described Perry's accusations as "presumptuous" because the timing of the disclosure was intended to give the impression that Egypt supports the US allegations. According to Zeineddin, Perry should have raised the issue before or after his trip to Egypt. "The timing of the accusations gives the impression to the international community that Egypt is backing the issue," he said.

Many in the Arab world believe that the latest

US accusations are part of a campaign to destabilise the Libyan regime.

According to Al-Montasser, since the mid-1980s, American administrations have misinterpreted anything that Libya does because Libya's political ideology "does not coincide with the US when it comes to the Arab World and Africa."

Libya is isolated internationally by a UN air embargo for failing to hand over two men accused of bombing a PanAm airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988.

At a press conference earlier this month, the Arab League's Secretary General, Esmat Abdel-Meguid, said that Libya has every right to refuse to hand over the two Libyans to be tried in another country unless there is an extradition treaty with the country concerned. The US and Britain have demanded that Libya hand over the two suspects for trial in either country, but the Libyan leader has refused to comply.

Abdel-Meguid called on the UN Security Council to set up a special court with Scottish judges to try the two suspects. "A settlement of time. It is poisoning the whole atmosphere in the area, adversely affecting Libya, the Arab states bordering it and many Mediterranean countries that are very keen to trade with Libya," he said.

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The envelopes will be opened at 12.00 O'clock noon at HFDI in the presence of tenderers' representatives on Monday 27 of May 1996.

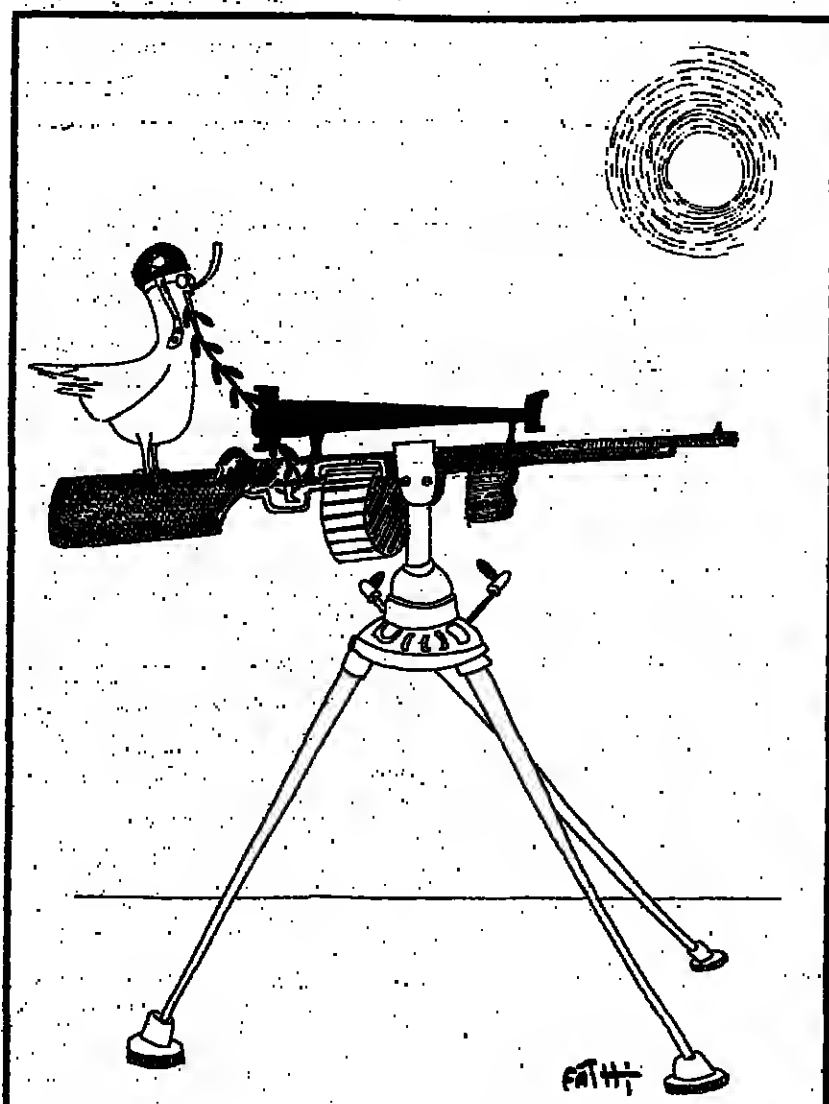
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A Palestinian guerrilla fighter with an anti-aircraft machine gun at the refugee camp of Ain Al-Hilwa in Sidon which was hit on Tuesday, sending shivers down the spines of those who had come to the town to find shelter. Meanwhile, these children are amongst almost half a million Lebanese refugees who fled southern Lebanon heading northwards. (photo: Reuters, AP)

'Israel must leave'

The displaced, the bereaved, the wounded and the dead bear the marks of seven days of shelling. Only the black-clad figures, patrolling the streets with ammunition strapped to their waists, are immune to the pressure, writes Julie Till from South Lebanon

Israel calls it precise military bombing. But with cross-border Katyusha attacks continuing, it is Lebanese civilians who are fleeing, not Hezbollah fighters. Around 400,000 Lebanese civilians have streamed out of southern Lebanon since Israel ordered the evacuation of a 30km area close to its northern border. Those who had time strapped mattresses and blankets to car roofs. Others fled with only the clothes they were wearing.

It was not only homes and personal belongings that were left behind. In the panic to escape, one man from the village of Sowani, under attack from Israeli gunships, arrived in the southern port of Sidon, only to discover that two of his children had been left behind. He returned home to find them.

Another woman from the town of Nabatiyeh, a Hezbollah stronghold and a frequent target of Israeli shelling, arrived in Sidon with six of her daughters, just ahead of the 11am Sunday deadline for evacuating her town. The seventh had been left behind. Unable to find her as they dashed for safety, Soud Wahabi could only hope that relatives had picked her up. Meanwhile, Soud and her children had no idea where they would be sleeping that night.

Some of the displaced had originally fled to the port of Tyre, only to be moved on again by Israeli gunships. Others had sought refuge with relatives and friends living in the overcrowded southern slums of Beirut. But with five attacks on the capital so far, that is no safe haven either.

As Philippe Guillard, head of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Lebanon, told *Al-Akram* Weekly, "In 1993 most of the 350,000 displaced by Israeli shelling came to the southern suburbs of Beirut. This time it is different. The suburbs are not safe."

Indeed, living in or simply driving through the mainly Shi'ite-populated southern suburbs is to risk becoming a potential target. As we drove along the airport road on Sunday, seeing huge cardboard figures of Ayatollah Khomeini and former Shi'ite leader Imam Musa Al-Sadr held sway in a district of mainly one-storey, makeshift shops and homes, passers-by urged us on. It was not an unfriendly greeting; we had slowed down near a Hezbollah mosque and there were white specks

in the sky. After 17 years of war, and two invasions by their southern neighbour, the local population can read the signs.

And sure enough, 10 minutes later a power station on the outskirts of Beirut was bombed, cutting off electricity to some parts of the city. The cost of repairs is estimated at \$3 million. A second power station was hit on Monday. This time it was in Christian east Beirut. The cost of repairing this power plant, which supplies both Shi'ite and Christian areas, is reckoned to be around \$80 million.

It was only in January of this year that the government announced an end to electricity rationing and the resumption of an almost 24-hour service. This week it was back to blackouts and private generators, for those who can afford them.

Lebanon has been steadily rebuilding itself, repairing the infrastructure destroyed during its deadly civil war. Intensive reconstruction is in evidence in the centre of the city. The stock market re-opened in January and a growing number of foreign banks have been enticed back to the country once known as the Switzerland of the Middle East.

Now, after three years of rebuilding both the infrastructure and Lebanon's image among potential investors and tourists, the dream is slipping away. And while people here blame the timing of the attack on Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres' electoral hopes, there is a growing tendency to ascribe the scale of the attack to Israel's desire to knock out a potential economic rival.

But for the moment, the population of the south has suspended normal life and the economy is in paralysis. "We have a social disaster in southern Lebanon, and government resources are limited," Hassan Youssef, president of the Council of the South, told the *Weekly*. Two things were needed, he said: "First an end to the bombings and second, medical, financial and military help."

The government has opened schools, mosques and churches to help the displaced. At a school in Sidon, children's clothes hang out of classroom windows, as 82 families from 12 different villages and towns set up

camp. Families are provided with blankets, tinned food such as tuna and *foul* (beans) and portable butane gas stoves by the government, Islamic associations and secular NGOs like the Hariri Foundation and the Red Cross.

The Palestinian refugee camp of Ain Al-Hilwa in Sidon was hit on Tuesday, sending shivers down the spines of those who had come to Sidon to find shelter. Hoda Hamadi arrived at the village of Safi Milki near Sidon with her five children on Friday. Her husband was not with them. He had left the family at the school to go back and check on their house.

With her knee-length skirt and no scarf, Hoda does not fit the usual image of a Hezbollah supporter, but she is firmly behind the group: "We are with Hezbollah and the resistance," she said. "We want God to help Hezbollah win and the people of Lebanon win."

Israeli officials argue that their intention is only to attack Hezbollah military targets, but Hoda thinks otherwise. In 1992, she was hit by Israeli bullets in her stomach and back. "I spent five months in hospital, away from my children," she recalled. And if the war is directed against Hezbollah, "why did Israel hit that ambulance on Saturday, in which four children and two women were killed?"

The youngest casualty of that incident, a five-month old baby, was taken to the Hamoudi hospital in Sidon. An emergency physician at the hospital, Dr Rola Ghandour, described how one woman from Nabatiyeh, carrying twins in her seventh month of pregnancy, had miscarried the first at home "because of the shelling". She aborted the second on arrival at the hospital.

Aside from the physical injuries, the other problem facing those in the bombed areas is psychological trauma, according to neurosurgeon Adeb Abdou. "People are very afraid," he said. "They are anxious and depressed. There are at least five women at the hospital about to give birth prematurely because of the pressure."

Only Hezbollah shows no signs of suffering from the pressure. Day after day, despite the bombardment, Hezbollah has continued to fire Katyusha rockets at northern Israel. On the streets of West Beirut supporters play

musical instruments and collect the money for the displaced. Hezbollah has released a video, shown on its own TV channel and distributed to other stations, of 60 supporters with explosives strapped to their chest. It is perhaps the willingness of these men to act as suicide bombers that has kept Israel in the skies and off the ground.

The resolve of Hezbollah has certainly not diminished. In its stronghold of Harat Horeik in the southern suburb of Beirut, the walls are adorned with pictures of Mecca and Jerusalem, alongside the omnipresent Khomeini. A petrol station near the Hezbollah offices flies two flags — one in the party colours, the other black to commemorate the martyrs.

As Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri has acknowledged, the Lebanese army is no match for Israel's superior military might. However, stationed across the city, on various street corners, pieces of wasteland and traffic junctions, they do provide, or rather provide, the semblance of security. But in Harat Horeik and Hezbollah's other strongholds, it is Hezbollah gunmen who patrol the streets. Dressed in black army fatigues with green ammunition belts strapped around their waists, Hezbollah fighters carry Katyushas and communicate by cellular phone. In their unmarked, barely-furnished offices, Hezbollah officials are polite and to the point. Speaking on condition of anonymity, they warned that "Israel must leave this land and stop shelling, otherwise we will continue."

His colleague added, not without a hint of pride: "Hezbollah has answered Peres. There can be no security in Kiryat Shmona if Israel hits villages in southern Lebanon. If Israel hits Beirut, we will hit any place in the world," echoing the warning of Hezbollah's Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah, this week, that the volleys of Katyushas currently being fired at Kiryat Shmona are just in retaliation for the raids over South Lebanon. Raids Beirut, said Nasrallah, will be answered by striking at Israeli targets anywhere in the world.

So, 14 years after the Israeli invasion, code-named "Operation Peace in Galilee", and after seven days of heavy shelling, there is little security for civilians on either side, and prospects for a lasting peace are as remote as ever.

Shattered hopes

Lebanon and Syria have come under increasing pressure to rein in Hezbollah guerrillas in the wake of Israel's onslaught against Lebanon.

The Lebanese government is studying an American proposal to halt the Israeli military offensive, but Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri has said it will be difficult for his country to accept the proposed conditions.

Intense diplomatic activity is under way to reach a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah. Damascus, which is the main power broker in Lebanon with 35,000 troops stationed here, was a venue for separate meetings between Syrian, Lebanese, French and Iranian officials.

Israeli television broadcast a report which outlined the proposed settlement of the crisis. It said that Syria would curb Hezbollah's military activities and, in return, Israel would withdraw from the south after nine months. The Syrian and Lebanese armies would ensure security on the Lebanese-Israeli border.

A political commentator in Lebanon said, "Israel wants security guarantees because it is election time there. Israel is emptying the villages in the south and it seems that the return of the refugees may coincide with the deployment of the Lebanese army in the area." France may also play a role in the security arrangements. President Jacques Chirac mentioned during a recent visit to Beirut that his country was willing to take part in peacekeeping operations in the area.

Concerned parties are now trying to revive a 1993 understanding between Israel and Lebanon barring attacks against civilians on both sides of the border. Iran, which supports and finances Hezbollah, hinted that the resistance movement might stop rocketing Israel if the latter stopped bombarding civilian targets in Lebanon.

For its part, Syria said it was ready to help restrain Hezbollah if Israel respected the 1993 understanding. Hezbollah has spearheaded the guerrilla war to oust Israeli troops from the 15km-wide border strip it occupies in South Lebanon.

Political analysts here believe that Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres is conducting his election campaign in Lebanon. The raids come seven weeks before Peres faces a general election. He has met a demand by Israeli voters to strike back at Hezbollah. Peres sent a message to Syria and Lebanon that he expects them to rein in Hezbollah guerrillas. Analysts feel that Peres's tough stance against Hezbollah is aimed at enhancing his image as a man who can protect the Israelis.

Mohamed Mashmouhi, deputy editor-in-chief of the leftist *As-Safir* daily, said, "Israel believes that by scaling off the Palestinian-ruled areas and arresting hundreds of Hamas activists and by bombing Lebanon, it has satisfied the Israeli voters' demand for security. Peres also wants military credentials like his predecessor Yitzhak Rabin. He wants Israelis to regard him not only as a statesman but as a military hero as well. This will give him a mandate to make peace."

An editorial in the conservative *An-Nahar* newspaper said that there were three possibilities after a ceasefire was brokered: "Either Israel and Hezbollah will agree to uphold their July 1993 understanding, or another agreement will be reached to secure peace on the border, or the attacks will continue until the Israeli elections."

Beirut's hands are tied. Reconstruction has come to a halt and, in the eyes of the public, a clash between the government and Hezbollah would only reinforce the Israeli occupation in the south, writes Zeina Khodr from Beirut

While Israel says its offensive is targeted at Hezbollah, Lebanese House Speaker Nabih Berri said the onslaught was not just against Hezbollah but against the Lebanese people as a whole. Israel had warned that if Lebanon failed to curb Hezbollah, it would put at risk Lebanon's rebirth six years after its 15-year civil war ended.

For the first time since 1982 Israeli planes have bombed the Lebanese capital. The southern suburbs, a stronghold of Hezbollah, have been particularly badly hit. Scores of villages in South Lebanon and the Western Bekaa have been attacked and the Lebanese army has also been targeted. A Syrian army officer was killed in one raid close to Beirut's international airport, which has closed a number of times because of the raids.

Israeli aggression has left more than 30 people dead, mainly civilians and over 140 wounded. It has also sent close to half a million people fleeing from the south, creating a huge refugee crisis. Israeli gunships stopped commercial ships bound for the port of Beirut and imposed a sea blockade on the southern ports of Sidon and Tyre. Hezbollah has retaliated against the onslaught by firing scores of Katyusha rockets into northern Israel.

Mashmouhi ruled out the possibility of Israel widening its security zone. However, he stressed that Israel's strategy has always been to control as much of Lebanon's water resources as it can.

Israel has repeatedly said that its offensive will continue until Hezbollah stops launching rockets into northern Israel. Israeli Foreign Minister Elmad Barak said the offensive, dubbed Operation Grapes of Wrath, had two objectives: to hit Hezbollah and to make it clear to the Lebanese government that Israel holds it responsible for Hezbollah's actions.

Hariri said his government — even though it disagrees with the movement — would not try to stop Hezbollah from attacking Israeli troops while the occupation continued. "We will not clash with the resistance, namely Hezbollah, as long as the occupation exists on our land," he said. "If we do anything against Hezbollah, the public will think we are facilitating the occupation of our territory. The only solution is for Israel to withdraw and trust Lebanon to establish security on the border." He pledged that Lebanon was now capable of guaranteeing security and would send most of its 55,000-men army to the south to do so.

Some commentators say that Lebanon is witnessing a repeat of the 1982 invasion of Beirut when Israeli forces drove the PLO out of Lebanon. This time they are driving Hezbollah from South Lebanon, they say. Meanwhile the Lebanese are paying dearly. Israel has launched an all-out war on Lebanon — with the backing of the United States and other permanent members of the UN Security Council, particularly Britain — in a bid to wipe out what they consider to be terrorists. But Lebanon disagrees and says resistance guerrillas are freedom fighters.

The Israeli air raids have brought back images of Lebanon's 1975-90 civil war. Lebanon has been striving hard to rebuild itself. Israel's attack caught Beirut in the midst of a reconstruction boom. But Lebanese hopes for rebirth depend heavily on peace in the region and the Israeli offensive has dealt a heavy blow to these.

Moussa blasts Israeli aggression

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa asserts that only withdrawal from Lebanese territories can guarantee Israeli security, reports Nevine Khalil

Speaking to the press after attending President Hosni Mubarak's meeting with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat on Tuesday, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said the situation in South Lebanon was "very critical". He did not rule out the possibility that there was a link between the escalation of violence in south Lebanon and the Israeli elections scheduled to be held at the end of next month.

"We cannot deny that there are electoral considerations," Moussa said. "But I cannot say that [the elections] are behind all that has happened." He suggested that secret agreements and deals during the election campaign might have fuelled the situation further. He added, however, that the elections should not prevent the implementation of previously concluded agreements.

Moussa said that the aggression in Lebanon dominated the two-hour meeting between Mubarak and Arafat. The minister said that Egypt condemns Israel's offensive against Lebanon and is calling for an immediate ceasefire. Civilians should be "spared from attacks by planes, artillery and rockets," Moussa said. The minister referred to the 1993 agreement between Lebanon and Israel which stipulates that civilian targets be spared and rules governing combat be implemented and guaranteed.

Egypt also wants Israel to implement UN Security Council Resolution 425, which requires it to withdraw from Lebanese territory. Moussa noted that, since Israel has frequently stated that it has no territorial ambitions in Lebanon, its current offensive action is probably due to security concerns. But, Moussa argued, if Israel implemented the 1993 Lebanese-Israeli agreement and withdrew its forces from Lebanese territory, "a different situation altogether" would be created, which would "guarantee the safety and welfare of the civilian population on both sides".

Egypt is currently undertaking a number of diplomatic initiatives to contain the situation. These efforts include contacts with the Israeli, US and French foreign ministers. But so far they have been to no avail. Similarly, American contacts with the Israelis, the Lebanese and the Syrians have failed to bring about an end to the shelling. On a visit to Israel on Monday, France's Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette proposed that France mediate between the two warring parties. It has been reported, however, that Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres would only accept US brokering.

"Diplomatic efforts have resulted in nothing so far," Moussa said. "But anything can happen."

According to political observers, Israel has breached the decisions made at the Sharm El-Sheikh Peacemakers Summit last month by unleashing a war of terror against Lebanese civilians and jeopardising the peace process. Moussa said that the current situation has crippled the peace process. "We can't simplify the situation. It's already very complicated," Moussa remarked.

Next Monday, the Sharm El-Sheikh follow-up meeting of foreign ministers will convene in Luxembourg. "If the situation continues as it is, [Lebanon] will of course be discussed," Moussa said.

April is the cruellest month

By Mona Anis

On Tuesday Israel celebrated Yom Hashoah, the day of remembrance marking the Nuremberg trial 50 years ago. Recalling the atrocities of the Holocaust though did not stop Israel from continuing its six-day long bombardment of 200 villages in South Lebanon, as well as the cities of Tyre, Sidon and Beirut, killing and wounding scores of innocent civilians and displacing around half a million others.

Israel, apparently, believes it has a monopoly on remembrance. Certainly it seems intent on denying others, especially Arabs, the right to remember the injustices committed against them at the hands of the Jewish state. Revenge, when exercised by Israel, is miraculously transformed into justice. Strangely, when practiced by Arabs, it is barbarism and terrorism.

Vengeance and aggression are not virtues to be extolled. But for justice and reason ever to triumph the aggressor must first acknowledge the horrors he has inflicted on innocent people. It is, then, in keeping with the spirit marking the remembrance of the Nuremberg trials that one should remind the Jewish people of some of the crimes committed by the rulers of Israel, a state which claims to be the embodiment of their aspirations.

Forget about the expropriation of Palestinian land, and the accompanying massacres, to establish a Jewish state, and let us for the purposes of this column concentrate on the wars over Lebanon.

It was on 13 April, 1975 that what has been termed the Lebanese civil war erupted in Beirut. On that day a bus full of young Palestinians, returning from a meeting commemorating some national event, was stopped at Ain Al-Romanah. Those inside were asked to disembark. Once off the bus they were lined up and machine-gunned.

The event these young people had attended before taking the bus back to their refugee camp marked the memory of three men, Mohamed Youssef Al-Najar, Kamal Adwan and Kamal Nasser, assassinated in their homes in Beirut on 10 April, 1973. They were killed by an Israeli special operations unit led by Yehud Barak, who was later to become the IDF chief-of-staff and who is now Israel's foreign minister. His recent elevation to Israel's top diplomatic post has not, however, stopped him from uttering the most crude racist statements.

The scale of the atrocities, mass crimes and massacres which have taken place since that fateful day in April, more than two decades ago, would fill volumes.

Now Israel can claim to its heart's content that what began in April 1975 was an inter-Lebanese war, with some Lebanese factions fighting against others who just happened to form an alliance with the Palestinians. But everybody knows that those who machine-gunned the bus at Ain Al-Romanah were Israeli stooges, just as every one knows that it was Israel that for seven years financed and fanned the flame of the "civil war", until it was finally ready to mount its own full scale war over Lebanon, dubbed Operation Peace in Galilee, in June 1982. The Palestinians were expelled and, for three years southern Lebanon was occupied. Israel finally pulled out, but only after creating the so-called security zone, manned mainly by its agents.

From that day until now Israel has subjected the Lebanese people, especially the people of the south, to periodic onslaughts. And their crime, the reason for these attacks? The refusal of the Lebanese people to capitulate to Israel, and their insistence that Israel should comply with UN Security Council resolution 425.

In 1993 Israel began another major offensive, this time called Operation Accountability, with the aim of finishing off any resistance to its occupation. They failed, and finally reached an agreement in July 1993. Hezbollah agreed to confine its operations to the occupied zone on condition that Israel desisted from attacking civilians outside that zone.

In the last few weeks Israel has violated the agreement twice, launching attacks outside the occupied zone on 30 March and 8 April, killing three civilians. Hezbollah responded to these two violations by firing volleys of Katyusha rockets into northern Israel. The reaction gave Israel its excuse to launch Operation Grapes of Wrath.

Who is the aggressor in all of this, and who the victim? The answer is obvious. Unless, of course, you assume, as Israel appears to, that past atrocities committed against Jews exonerates a state purporting to represent Jews from any responsibility. Israel, in monopolising remembrance, seeks to monopolise its status as victim. The reason it seeks to do so is to absolve itself of any responsibility. But this it can never do, if only because Arabs, too, have a memory.

Liberia's sinking hopes

Salim Ahmed Salim, the OAU secretary-general, tells Gamal Nkrumah about the tail end of his endeavours to ease Africa's tribulations

Salim Ahmed Salim, the OAU secretary-general, was a relaxed Organisation of African Unity (OAU) secretary-general who received me in his hotel suite last week. Salim Ahmed Salim, a Tanzanian national, is optimistic by nature. Fresh waves of terror are tearing the West African nation of Liberia apart, but he is certain that all will be well. "We are doing our best to stem the blood flow," he said. "Africa's prosperity depends on how well we are able to end civil wars and give every one of our continent's countries the means to maintain peace within its own borders."

Salim was in Cairo to attend the signing of the African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty, but his mind was on more explosive matters — the war in Liberia. The latest spate of fighting has rendered thousands homeless and hungry. Intersecting warfare in Liberia was triggered off in December 1989 when Charles Taylor, now a member of Liberia's ruling military faction, occupied the capital, Monrovia, and fought his main rival Alhaji Kromah — a leader of the country's Muslim minority. Kromah now sides with Taylor. Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia, once vilified for being Libyan Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's henchmen, is the most powerful of Liberia's factions today. Taylor's troops are leading the search to arrest Roosevelt Johnson, who is wanted for war crimes, and to neutralise his army, composed mainly of ethnic Krahn.

Arms dealers are having a field day in Liberia. The fact that faction leaders have repudiated earlier promises to hold the peace is deplorable. Horror stories about unimaginable atrocities are emerging out of Liberia with scenarios reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Liberia's warlords have scores to settle with each other and with outsiders. Faction leaders are on the warpath again and it has become meaningless to ask who is the enemy, the spoiler or what exactly they are fighting for. Conrad's description of last century's Congolese labourers is an apt description for this decade's Liberian militia. "They were all dying slowly... They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now."

The Liberian civil war has claimed 150,000 lives. Salim disclosed that the OAU is collaborating with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations to end the six-year war. "We are working closely with both organisations. We have a special representative in the person of the former president of Zimbabwe, Cde Robert Mugabe. He is what we call the OAU's permanent personality for Liberia. He also serves as my special representative in Liberia. We have been working together with ECOWAS in all the negotiations. We are also working very closely with the UN. When I was in [the Liberian capital] Monrovia recently, everyone was singing his praises. Everyone was paying tribute to him and the role he has been playing."

He is resident in [the Zimbabwean capital] Harare, but he goes regularly to Monrovia. He shuttles between [the Nigerian capital] Abuja, [the Ghanaian capital] Accra and other West African cities following up and participating in all the [peace] talks in [the Beninois city of] Cotonou and elsewhere. I myself was in Cotonou about two weeks ago, but the fact is that despite all our efforts and those of others, we have a situation that is quite critical right now in Liberia," the OAU secretary-general said.

But why has the six-year civil war in Liberia dragged on so? "This deplorable situation has two causes. First, it is the responsibility of the faction leaders. They have not abided by the Abuja agreement which they signed. What is happening today is a clear violation of the Abuja agreement. Today, the fighting has intensified in the Liberian capital. It is most regrettable," Salim said. "Secondly, the war in Liberia is also the responsibility of the international community," he added.

"Both Charles Taylor and Alhaji Kromah have agreed to the demobilisation of their armies. There is no way we can impose peace in Liberia without the cooperation of the faction leaders. I think we have the responsibility to pin them down to that agreement. I met Taylor two weeks ago and he assured me that they were committed to the peace process," Salim said.

"A peacekeeping force must have the resources and the manpower at its disposal to perform its duties properly. African countries are making tremendous sacrifices despite their own trying economic circumstances. In Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and Sierra Leone public opinion is for helping Liberia. I've been making this point to politicians and businessmen in the US, Europe and Japan. We expect more support from the rest of the world. High costs are always pleaded as the reason for proceeding slowly when it comes to reconstruction," Salim sighed.

The illicit production and processing of narcotics have had a disastrous impact on the Liberian civil war. Human rights abuses and atrocities go hand in hand with drug abuse by the militia. "The UN Drug Control Programme and the OAU signed a memorandum of understanding that provides for cooperation between the two organisations and foresees, *inter alia*, the exchange of information and sharing of expertise as well as joint activities to stop the diffusion of the widespread use of narcotics in Africa. Drug abuse by both children and adult fighters accounts for the worst atrocities committed both on the battlefield and among civilians caught in the crossfire," Salim warned.

Salim spotlighted the central issue. "What we need in Liberia given the Abuja agreement is to ensure that the peacekeepers are provided for and are well-equipped so that they can, by their presence, create the necessary climate of confidence, disarmament and normalisation," he stressed.

"Pressure must be brought to bear on the faction leaders to abide by the Abuja agreement and to equip and provide the necessary resources for the [West African peacekeeping] ECOMOG forces to do their job properly," Salim said.

What happened in New York last October? "The chairman of the State Council of Liberia co-chaired a meeting with Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings concerning Liberia's reconstruction. Donors met with Liberians. What is still missing before we go into the process of reconstruction is the need to halt the escalating war in Liberia. One of the stipulations of the Abuja agreement was that the fighters must be disarmed. They have not been. If the factions were disarmed, we would not have the factional fighting we see in Monrovia today," Salim lamented.

"The international community is just as guilty as the faction leaders in perpetuating the war since it has not provided ECOMOG with sufficient arms and ammunition and financial support to carry out their peacekeeping duties."

Food and medicine in Monrovia are dangerously scarce. Little is being done about the scarcity of food and medicine. Over 20,000 civilians, including foreign dip-



A Liberian child is treated for a bullet wound in the American Embassy's Greystone Compound, Monrovia. Greystone used to house the embassy's personnel. Now, 20,000 people have taken refuge there (photo: AP)

lomats and missionaries have fled to the Greystone Compound of the American Embassy in Monrovia and to UN offices in the city. "Last Thursday, mobs broke down the gates of the UN headquarters in Monrovia, eating communications with the New York headquarters of the organisation," UN spokeswoman Sylvana Foa told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Buildings used by UNICEF, the UN High Commission for Refugees and the UN Development Programme were also looted. The UN food distribution system feeds over 150,000 people in Liberia today," she added.

"In the next few days there could be mass starvation," warned Liberia's Roman Catholic Archbishop Michael Francis as he unceremoniously boarded an American helicopter to flee the country. Eyewitness accounts speak of the eeriness of Liberia's embattled seaside capital. The Mamba Joint diplomatic quarter is a shambles. "It has been a nightmare," said UN World Food Programme officer Tsukasa Kinoto.

"Working in war zones is a relatively new phenomenon for most humanitarian agencies, though some lessons have been drawn," confessed Yasushi Akashi, UN undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs. Akashi was playing down accusations of "regrettable rivalry" among UN agencies and "a lack of policy coherence" which had been made by a 563-page report compiled by several UN agencies, donor nations, humanitarian relief groups and non-governmental organisations.

The foreign community in Liberia was hastily evacuated by the Americans last week. UN spokesman Ahmad Fawzi told the *Weekly* that most of the 90 UN mil-

itary observers had taken refuge in the US Embassy compound. The Egyptian ambassador to Liberia, Ahmed El-Messiri, and most of his staff likewise took refuge in the compound of the American Embassy and have since left the country. "Liberians have a good country that God has given to the wrong people," said a Lebanese businessman who was born in Liberia, when his electronics shop was looted after the latest round of fighting. The Lebanese Foreign Ministry officially asked the US to evacuate all 30,000 Lebanese nationals "caught in the crossfire. Roosevelt Johnson has abducted 50 Lebanese nationals and is holding them hostage. A wave of indignation against the Lebanese traders who control commercial activity in Liberia has swept through the country."

"This country must not slide into the abyss," US Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright insisted as she toured Liberia recently. Elections are to be held in August with American financial backing. Immediate investigations into human rights abuses are also to be funded by America, Albright hinted. American entrepreneurs are already sniffing out business opportunities in resource-rich Liberia. Reconstruction contracts are on the cards and 38 American businessmen were among those who were evacuated from the country earlier in the week.

Three American amphibious warships are positioned just outside Liberian territorial waters on the alert to help both foreigners and Liberians escape the turmoil. They are supported by helicopters and equipped with additional take-off platforms and medical facilities. "The US will act to protect American citizens, American dependents and others," insisted the Clinton administration's press secretary, Mike McCurry. But McCurry warned that he was not going to get into a more elaborate discussion of what steps were contemplated. He stressed that with American support, Liberia was to have "some sort of coherent civil structure." The US, after all, had helped to "install" the ruling provisional State Council and interim government composed of warlords and civilians. America, McCurry promised, "will attempt to piece [Liberia] back together at a point in which [Americans] can have some reasonable assurance of security and are reassured the [factions] are stopping their fighting."

The commander of ECOMOG, Major General John Inengier, said that despite their inadequate resources, "his men would not stand by and let law and order break down in the city of Monrovia." But they have done just that — and it appears that as in Bosnia and other conflicts worldwide, only American intervention can guarantee even a semblance of peace.

Liberia is burying its dead in waste lots. Just as they begin to count the bodies and assess the extent of the devastation, Liberian warlords and poorly paid West African peacekeeping troops are rampaging the capital for food, fuel and loot. The war has rendered Liberia an economic wasteland — a nightmare microcosm of a broader security crisis facing the continent as a whole. Liberia epitomises Africa's international marginalisation. Somalia, too, is setting Africa a bad example. But, "Somalia is a different kettle of fish," the OAU secretary-general shrugged.

Africa's erratic winds of change

Have the dictators of yesterday merely changed their colours? Sophia Christoforakis looks at the dilemmas of Africa's democratic transitions

In the past month elections have taken place in three sub-Saharan African countries: Benin and Zimbabwe on 19 March and Sierra Leone on 16 March. The recent proliferation of elections in sub-Saharan Africa brings into question the degree to which the pro-democracy movement that swept the continent in the early 1990s has succeeded in changing the continent's political map. The movement has been geared towards the dismantling of the one-party state and authoritarian systems of government. In other words, the call has been for multi-party democracy and the creation of pluralist states. Since 1990, 35 of the 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa have had multi-party elections.

But have the winds of democratic change really swept through the continent, or are the budding institutions of African democracy merely cosmetic, chameleon-like dictators changing their colours?

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe and President Todor Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea were both voted back in this year in what Western observers claim were orchestrated elections. They have been ruling their countries for 10 and 17 years respectively. Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi was similarly re-elected last year and Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko has maintained power for 31 years, repeatedly postponing elections.

Helmy Shaarawy, director of the Arab Research Centre in Cairo, argues that historical leaders such as Mathieu Kérékou and Robert Mugabe, the recently re-elected leaders of Benin and Zimbabwe respectively, are not authoritarian rulers. Rather, he asserts, they are charismatic leaders with biblical influence who created stable democratic regimes during their reigns.

But Professor Cyrus Reed, an expert on African affairs at the American University in Cairo, is of the view that these leaders are a hindrance to democracy and are being re-elected because they have created essential roles for themselves in their countries' political systems and because they have largely orchestrated elections.

Justifiers of the one-party system have typically argued that African society is traditionally based on consensus and that the most suitable form of governance is a single party with a single leader. In Zimbabwe's recent presidential election, Didymus Musasa, a top official in Mugabe's Zimbabwe African Nationalist Union-Patriotic Front, reportedly argued that the poll was a meaningless ritual. "Our culture and traditions allow for only one leader," he said. "A king like Mugabe shouldn't be contested. This exercise is just to accommodate outsiders."

Professor Cyrus Reed argues that this is a misconception. "There is no tradition of a centralised ruler in Zimbabwe," he said. "There is no indication that Africans have traditionally preferred having one absolute leader. On the contrary, government in traditional African societies has been characterised by consultative assemblies."

Moreover, leaders like Mugabe have a special role to play in the system. Reed argues that "Mugabe is able to keep the dominant coalition together. No one else has the ability to maintain that structure and Mugabe believes in a one-party state system." But Reed points out that if Mugabe were to leave the political arena, "a more competitive political system would emerge."

The Zimbabwean leader won the 19 March presidential election because he was basically the only candidate; the opposition was fragmented and the four opposition parties withdrew their nominees in protest against electoral rules they say are lopsided in favour of Mugabe.

However, Helmy Shaarawy argues that despite the low poll in the recent presidential election, Zimbabwe can be seen as an example of a stable democracy in Africa. "The fact is that the people who went to the election elected Mugabe," he said. "When Mugabe started his rule he did engage in some dictatorial practices. But in later years he achieved a balance of power in Zimbabwe, both ethnically and socially. Zimbabwe has a charismatic leader, not an authoritarian one."

Shaarawy further argues that one of the primary factors that sustain leaders like Mugabe is the hold that historical power, usually attained during the independence period, has over the populace. "Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire is another example of this phenomenon," he said. "Although popular movements have been mobilising for his removal for the last three years he still sustains power. He is able to continue because he is backed by the military and by foreign assistance, but most of all because he is a man of historical power."

However, the recent re-instatement of Mathieu Kérékou to the presidency of Benin following the 19 March election throws points to a different trend. Benin was one of the first African states to dismantle the one-party state system during the democracy wave. Nicéphore Soglo's defeat of military ruler Mathieu Kérékou in the 1991 general elections was seen as a model for Africa's nascent democracies. The re-election of Kérékou makes Benin the first nation in Africa to vote a democratically elected leader out of office and replace him with a former dictator.

The two leaders of Benin epitomise Africa's political and economic predicament. During his 17-year rule Kérékou espoused Marxist-Leninist principles and was accused of ruining the economy and torturing political opponents. Soglo, on the other hand, is a former World Bank administrator, whose economic reforms have reportedly made Benin one of the fastest growing economies in West Africa. Benin's growth rate is expected to reach six per cent by the end of the year.

During the election campaign Kérékou projected himself as a redeeming founding father of the nation. "The wise man is coming back," cried many people who were too young to remember Kérékou's dictatorship. According to Helmy Shaarawy, "The people of Benin see Kérékou as a person who once organised society, controlled state bodies and confronted the French colonial past. But that doesn't mean that people are simply looking back. They are looking back not to repeat the dictatorial situation, but to create a role for civil society through the democratic process. The masses are looking for a strong political state — but within the democratic process."

The other factor that accounts for Kérékou's re-instatement is the impact of Soglo's economic reforms on the people of Benin. When Soglo implemented a free-market system many civil servants lost their jobs, and it was this part of the Benin electorate that brought Kérékou back to power. Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed, professor of political science at Cairo University and director of the Centre for the Study of Developing Countries, suggests that "The trend we see in Africa today is that economic difficulties are making recently instituted democratic governments unpopular. People yearn for the years of apparent unity, well defined goals and stability which they enjoyed under certain authoritarian leaders and single-party regimes."

Helmy Shaarawy agrees. "These regimes," he said "were elected to office at a time when the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund started advocating structural adjustment programmes that were primarily geared towards cutting state expenditure. Under these programmes they could not establish the organs to plan the economy to meet the basic needs of the masses."

According to El-Sayed, the tumultuous show of popular enthusiasm that marked the Benin elections is something of an anomaly in Africa. He argues that the continent's enthusiasm for political reform is waning. The inspirational ideologies which characterised the African national liberation period of the 1950s and 1960s have disappeared. "The predominant ideology after independence was socialism," El-Sayed explained. "No alternative ideology has replaced socialism. In fact, the new ideology is freedom of the market and multi-party democracy. This has been supported by certain groups in civil society."

Ultimately, though, the primary hindrance to democracy in Africa is economic. Economic control is also being used to impose Western-style democracy on vulnerable African countries.

This year Western donors suspended aid to Niger, a poverty-stricken country where up to 700,000 people are facing death through famine, when a military junta ousted the country's first democratically elected president.

This '90s wave of democratic transitions has been depicted as a second independence or liberation movement. The importance of the new transitions lies in the opportunities that are presented to ordinary people who were curialed by one-party states and military regimes. The problem, however, is that in many cases the elections have been staged — against economically destitute and war-torn backdrops — only to appease external donors.

Beef standards

THE MINISTRY of Supply and Trade last week announced that Egypt has lifted the ban imposed on 23 March on imports of European meat and cattle. However, Britain and Northern Ireland have not been exempted from the ban.

Ahmed El-Guweli, the minister of supply and trade, declared this week that the certificate of origin, along with the import receipts and the European release documents will be essential papers for the entry of the goods into Egyptian ports. In the meantime, Ambassador Michael McGeever, head of the European Commission's (EC) delegation in Egypt, has emphasised that the EU beef sold to Egyptian consumers is given the same safety guarantees as those provided to EU consumers.

He pointed out in a press release issued by the EC delegation that Egypt has very strict veterinary and health controls that prohibit the entry of any infected meat products. Egypt, he said, has not imported any cattle or beef from the United Kingdom since 1990, as a result of a decision taken by the Egyptian government.

McGeever added that members of the EU Council convened last week in Luxembourg to discuss current measures that are being implemented to ensure the health and safety of EU cattle, and to reassure consumers that beef products are free of the mad cow disease. The council, he said, has decided to take steps for the elimination of the BSE disease, including a mass slaughter of infected cows.

Egyptian-Kuwaiti agreement

AN AGREEMENT promoting cooperation between the Egyptian and Kuwaiti stock exchanges was signed early this week allowing both exchanges to cross-list shares.

In addition, according to the new agreement, Egyptian companies operating in securities-related sectors can hold talks and meetings with their Kuwaiti counterparts. This step aims at promoting and marketing the shares of Egyptian companies. These shares are expected to be floated in the near future.

Brokerage companies in both countries will also receive buying and selling bids for securities of both exchanges.

Turkish investors

SEEKING new business and investment opportunities in Egypt, a delegation of Turkish businessmen operating in Europe is expected to arrive in Cairo tomorrow for a six-day visit. The businessmen are scheduled to meet with their Egyptian counterparts and officials.

About 55,000 Turkish businessmen do business in Western European countries, of whom 40,000 work in Germany.

The delegation's visit will coincide with that of Turkey's Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Onur Oymen, who is scheduled to arrive in Cairo on 21 April.

Oil strike

A NEW oil well has been discovered recently in the Gulf of Suez by the Amoco Egypt East Tanka Company, which is owned by the Amoco Production Company, the operators of the East Tanka Marine Concession. The new discovery is the second in the area within the last three months.

Testing of the zone yielded a flow rate of 4,884 barrels of 31-degree API gravity crude oil, in addition to 3.7 million cubic feet of gas per day on a 21/8 inch choke. Development options of the well are being analysed.

The East Tanka Marine Area concession was officially signed in May, 1995, and all operations on the East Tanka lease will be carried out on a subcontract basis by the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation's Gulf of Suez Petroleum Company (GUPCO), Amoco's 50-50 joint venture partner.

Green thumb team

A OUTCH agricultural delegation, comprising representatives of 15 companies involved in activities relating to animal husbandry, horticulture, agricultural expansion, training and agricultural consultancy, is scheduled to arrive in Cairo on 22 April for a four-day visit.

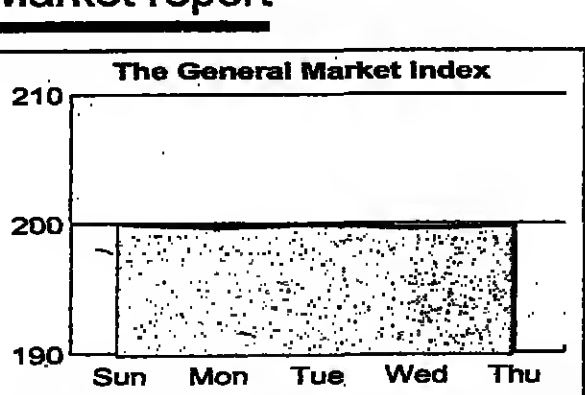
During their visit, members of the delegation will meet with Egyptian businessmen and officials, and will tour a number of agricultural production companies, especially in the new development communities.

EU grant

THE NEW Private Sector Development Programme (PSOP), funded by the European Union (EU), is to be managed by the consulting group, Carl Bro International. The contract for the management of the programme was signed by Ambassador Rafiq Salahuddin of the Ministry of International Cooperation and Michael McGeever, head of the European Commission (EC) in Cairo.

The PSOP is funded by a ECU 25 million grant from the EU and will assist the Egyptian private sector in upgrading its business and productivity, provide them with business information, training and other services and help promote exports.

Market report



Trading value plummets

THE GENERAL Market Index (GMI) once again declined, this time closing at 200.64 for the week ending 11 April. The volume of transactions witnessed a corresponding loss, plummeting to LE36.3 million compared to LE91.4 million the week before.

The manufacturing sector's index also declined, losing 0.96 points to close at 262.78. Shares of the Paints and Chemical Industries Company continued on their two-week slump, dropping by LE5 per share to close at LE620, while those of the Damietta Spinning and Weaving Company lost LE2.49 to close at LE47.4. And, despite an announcement that its half-year net profits amounted to LE12.56 million, shares of the Alexandria Pharmaceuticals and Chemical Industries Company fell in value by LE0.25 to close at LE74. Shares of the Abu Kier Fertilisers and Chemical Industries Company lost LE2 to close at LE33 per share.

Among the week's winners in the sector was the Family Cosmetics Company, whose shares gained LE4.75 to level off at LE115, while those of the Egypt International for Pharmaceutical Industries Company gained LE3.99 to close at LE114.99.

Trading in shares of the financial and real estate sector's companies was not much better than that of the manufacturing sector. The shares of the Misr International Bank (MIBank) lost LE10 to close at LE260. However, shares of the Dakkhia Commercial Bank gained LE0.98 per share to close at LE14.25, while those of the National Bank-Société Générale captured the lion's share of the market transactions, trading LE7.6 million in shares or 21.32 per cent of total market transactions. The value of its shares, however, remained unchanged at LE270.

The Gulf Arab Investment Company marked the highest turnover in terms of number of shares traded. It captured 22.84 per cent of the total number of shares traded. The Shams Development and Housing Company registered the highest increase in share value, its shares gaining 13.64 per cent of their opening value to close at LE5.

In all, the shares of 22 companies increased in value, 31 decreased and 22 remained unchanged.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

A mining dud in Abu Tartour

Wasted resources and opportunities seem to be the only products of an inoperative 25 year-old mine, writes Gamal Essam El-Din

A parliamentary fact-finding commission, formed two weeks ago to look into the reasons why the Abu Tartour phosphate-mining project in Al-Wadi Al-Gadid has failed to yield any results since it was launched almost 25 years ago, found the project a victim of changing political and economic conditions.

Although the commission is not expected to complete its task before the end of May, *Al-Ahram Weekly* has learned that the preliminary information gathered shows that the project was a failure from the start.

Investigation into the project revealed that not only were grave mistakes committed in its implementation but that it still needs LE8 billion to start operating.

Addressing a meeting of the fact-finding team recently, Faisal El-Sharkawi, a member of the commission, said the

project was established in the late sixties to help meet Egypt's future needs for phosphate and to promote the country's phosphate exports, especially to the Soviet Union.

However, El-Sharkawi added, President Abdel Nasser's decision in 1962 to expel Soviet military experts negatively affected Egyptian-Soviet relations to the extent that Russia declined to fulfil its promise of providing technical assistance in implementing the project or importing the phosphate ore.

According to MF George Philip Azer, a professor of geology at Cairo University, the project was launched under a misconception that Egypt's phosphate deposits in the Nile Valley are expected to be depleted within three or four years. However, he added, the fact is that the Nile Valley is still rich in phosphate ore and has deposits amounting to as

much as 1.5 billion tons with low percentages of alloys.

The commission's industrial consultant, Hassan Fahmi, noted that even with the completion of the expensive project, the export potential of the phosphate is not promising.

"I think it is being proven day in, day out that the notion of exporting phosphate to East Asian markets was not based on facts," said Fahmi. He said that while Tunisia and Morocco are now producing huge quantities of high-quality phosphate, Saudi Arabia is about to finish a project with an estimated production capacity of 4.5 million tons. Pakistan and Israel are now also establishing their own projects.

The fact-finding commission was formed following heated debates in the People's Assembly over a report submitted by the Central Auditing Agency (CAA) which re-

vealed that in spite of spending around LE1.9 million from 1974 to 1994, secured primarily through bank loans that will require around LE1.2 billion in interest payments, production has not yet begun.

According to the CAA report, the main objective of the project was to make use of the strategic phosphate deposits, estimated at about 715 million tons in the Abu Tartour area, to compensate for the depleted reserves in the Nile Valley. Although the initial costs of the project were approximately LE476 million, so far about LE2 billion has been spent.

This figure includes investment costs amounting to LE624 million, LE170 million in interest rates on loans taken out for investment, LE879 million to establish railroad tracks and a new harbour at Safage on the Red Sea and LE302 million in interest rates on loans taken out to build this in-

frastucture.

During the parliamentary debates which preceded the formation of the fact-finding commission, MPs uncovered more disturbing facts about the project. Ahmed Abu Ismail, a member of the opposition Wafd Party, focused on the fact that despite the project's grave financial situation, around LE80 million were spent as bonuses and incentives "for nothing."

Abu Ismail, who witnessed the early stages of the project as a former minister of finance under Sadat, also charged that the project's managers failed to operate Soviet-built equipment, and set out to buy additional equipment valued at LE20 million despite the Ministry of Planning's refusal to give its approval for the importing of this equipment. Abu Ismail argued it will be economically damaging to complete the project and urged

that it be written off or leased to an international company.

However, Industry Minister Soliman Reda contended the project is still economically feasible, especially as the Abu Tartour area contains huge reserves of phosphate.

Other deputies spoke out in support of the project. Abdel-Rehim El-Ghouh, an MP from Qena, said the project could create job opportunities, by contributing to the development of the area around it.

Hermas Radwan, an MP from Mansoura, argued that scrapping the project is, impossible, especially since the construction of a considerable part of the necessary infrastructure has been completed.

The People's Assembly's speaker, Ahmed Fathi Sorour, taking into account the conflicting viewpoints and figures, decided to refer the whole report to a fact-finding commission.

Pilgrimage at a lower price

New regulations governing hajj trips organised by travel agencies are helping pilgrims fulfil their religious duty. Abeer Anwar reports



The price of piety—now more affordable

Over the past few years several travel agencies specialising in hajj (pilgrimage) trips exploited the event to maximise their profits by charging exorbitant fees for the trip and the visa, and some went so far as to forge visas. However, a set of new regulations imposed by the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Chamber, aims at reducing the cost of the hajj and simplifying organisational guidelines.

Under the new regulations, the old system whereby a set number of shares was allocated to each agency has been cancelled. This system had dictated that the 24,000 hajj trips offered through the Ministry of Tourism were divided equally among about 600 participating agencies. Consequently, each agency had a quota of 37 trips. However, this low number of trips per agency meant that larger agencies often resorted to purchasing the allocated quotas of

smaller firms, whose owners took advantage of the situation by offering their quotas at a high price which was ultimately passed onto the pilgrim.

But the new system breaks travel agencies down into three categories according to their experience in organising hajj trips. Agencies which fall within the Class A category are those with more than five years of experience in the field and are allocated a maximum of 210 trips. Class B agencies are those with less than five years of experience and are given 140 trips. Class C firms are those with no experience and consequently are allocated 70 trips, explained Riyad Qabil, secretary general of the Tourism Chamber.

He added that the number of trips allocated to the firms is split into two stages. In the first stage, each agency is allowed to offer only two-

thirds of its maximum number of trips. This system will ensure that a rush on companies from one category will not infringe on the business of the companies falling under the other two divisions. For example, Class A agencies are allowed to offer only 140 of their 210 trips. Once all the spots have been filled under this quota for all categories, then the Tourism Chamber can request more of the 24,000 vacancies held by the ministry, should there still be demand for more spots. At this point, the agencies can offer the remaining third of their quota.

"Of course, this new system has created a great deal of competition among the different agencies, and has led to a decrease in the price of the hajj," stated Hussein Badran, a deputy at the Ministry of Tourism. "This is due to the fact that each agent tries to lower their price and of-

fer a higher level of service to attract the largest number of pilgrims."

Badran added that the ministry has set up for the first time an expenditure committee charged with revising the agencies' programmes to see how competitive they are in relation to the actual expenses incurred on the hajj.

This committee's activity, he said, has also helped push down the price of the hajj as agencies were concerned about having their licenses revoked by the ministry should they be found engaging in unfair business practices.

Farouk El-Morsi, president of the hajj Committee at the Tourism Chamber, explained that the relatively stable cost of transportation over the past two years has also helped reduce the price of the hajj. The new system, he added, will also make it clear which agency is more adept at organising these trips.

Few fish to fry

The mad cow disease scare may have chased many Egyptian consumers away from meat, but the short supply of fish is making it an unlikely alternative

There may be other fish in the sea, but they are not reaching the Egyptian market place.

Although Egypt overlooks a vast fishing area of about 13.9 million feddans, and has a large number of fish farms, the shortage in the supply of fish currently exceeds 150,000 tons, compared to 2,300 tons in 1972. The ensuing surge in prices has placed fish out of the affordable limits of many Egyptian consumers, thereby denying them an alternative source of protein.

One reason for the shortage, said Adel Khamis Soleiman, an assistant professor at the University of Alexandria's Faculty of Agriculture, is the population explosion which has not been matched by an increase in fishing.

In addition, he noted, while it is possible to fish as deep as 150 metres in the Mediterranean and Red Sea, fishermen only fish at depths ranging from 10-100m.

Another reason for the shortfall, Soleiman added, is that lakes are not properly utilised. Many of them have been filled in and reclaimed for agriculture, he said. This has brought the aggregate area of lakes to one-third of what it was several decades ago.

In 1950, for example, Lake Mariout covered an area of 40,000 feddans. Today, it covers only 15,000 feddans. In all, only 35 per cent of the fish on the market now comes from lakes.

Soleiman also noted that "our fish wealth has been drastically affected by the use of illegal fishing methods such as poison and explosives." Moreover, the use of small nets negatively impacts on the supply of fish by trapping small fish which have not yet grown fully or reproduced.

As a result, Egypt's self-sufficiency has been on a continual decline. In 1972, Egypt supplied 97.7 of its needs, but in 1990, the figure dropped to 68.5 per cent. Now it is even

lower, but no official figures are available.

The problem, however, transcends bad planning and inefficient methods as evidenced in the case of Lake Nasser, the second largest man-made lake in the world. Covering 1.25 million feddans, the lake has a projected fish production capacity of 80,000 tons per year, said, Fathi Taha, head of the Lake Nasser Development Authority (LNDAA).

But, he added, the lake's current production is 45,000 tons, of which only 50 per cent reaches the marketplace. There are several reasons for these shortcomings, said Taha, ranging from environmental factors to obstacles prohibiting the fish from actually reaching the market. As a man-made lake, there are no external currents as in natural lakes, and hence, no renewable food source for the lake's fish. This problem resulted in the disappearance of 50 out of the 54 species of fish that lived in the lake, thereby minimising its overall production.

But the major problem, he noted, is that the government has fixed the price of the catch from the lake. "Lake Nasser is the only lake whose production is officially set, and this has negatively impacted on the fishermen's willingness to sell their catch through legal

channels," Taha stated. For example, he said, fishermen sell the bolti fish to distributors at the government-set price of LE1.65 per kilogram. The fish, however, is sold on

the price.

Other efforts are in the works to boost the catch. The latest initiative, which is yet to be undertaken, is a decree to ban fishing for one month

be granted an alternative source of income. Implementing this ban, said Taha, will increase the lake's production by 30 per cent, while maintaining the lake's fishery.

Another initiative undertaken by the LNDAA was a proposal submitted to the Ministry of Economy and International Cooperation to extend for three years the technical cooperation agreement between the authority's Fishery Management Centre (FMC) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The FMC was set up in 1981 by a Japanese grant that allowed for the purchase of equipment, construction of ponds for hatching and breeding different species of fish, in addition to Japanese technical supervision of fishery projects.

But while a feasible solution to the problems confronting Lake Nasser is on the not-too-distant horizon, there are some other environmental and political obstacles that have hindered efforts to increase the supply of fish. According to Mohamed Mosaad Kamsoun, head of the Central Administration of the Western Region for Fish Wealth, the Mediterranean's strong currents make it an infertile ground for fishing. "The coast off Morocco is the richest in

fish because it is where the sea merges with the ocean," said Kamsoun.

Moreover, political tensions and conflicts kept parts of the Mediterranean closed until recently.

Kamsoun also noted that pollution from expansion in industrialisation coupled with the building of the Aswan High Dam contributed to the decline of marine life in the country's water bodies.

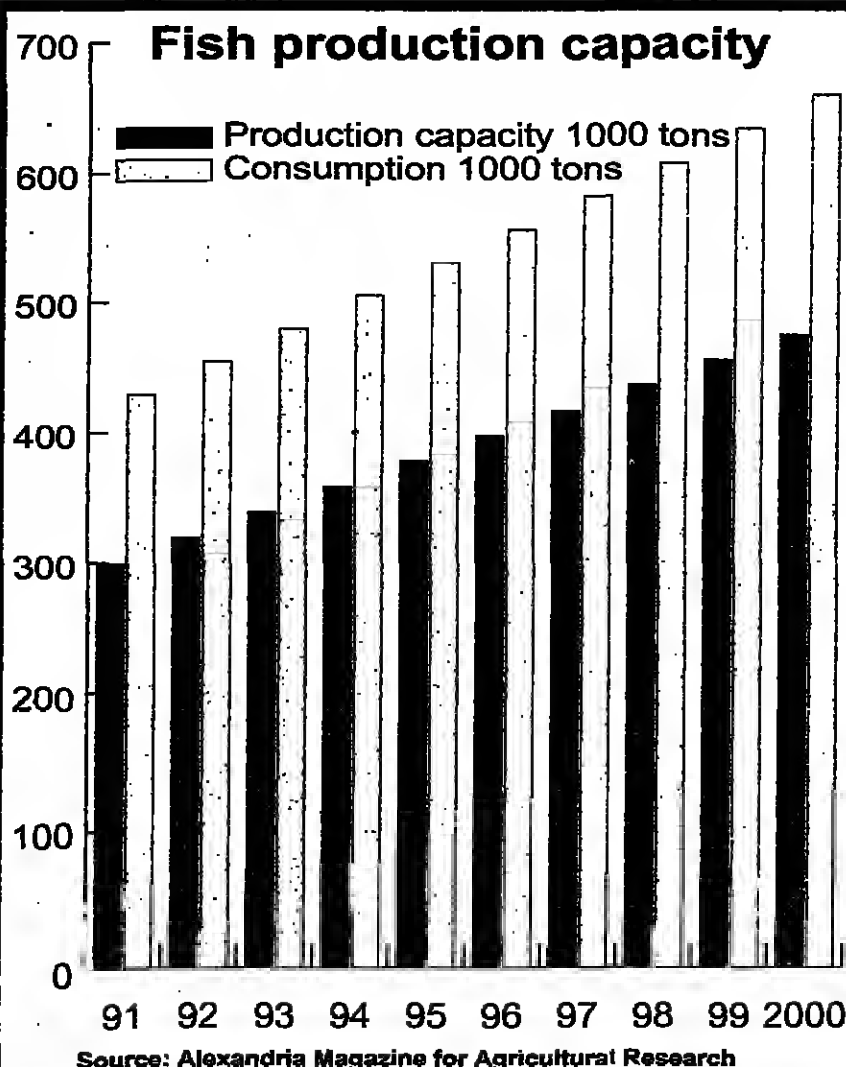
The causes of the problem are known, but the solutions are yet to be fully implemented. Arguing that developing the available resources is insufficient, Kamsoun stated, "We should look for new resources."

Egypt, he said, is in the process of concluding a number of agreements with countries boasting an abundance of aquatic life off their coasts. To date, an agreement has been signed with Yemen granting Egyptian fishing trawlers permission to operate within Yemeni territorial waters. Other agreements with Somalia and Eritrea are in the works.

Fish farms must also be expanded, Kamsoun noted, since they play the dual role of increasing fish production while aiding in the agricultural process. Barren land can be used to establish fish farms while drainage water from agricultural projects can be siphoned into the new farms, Kamsoun explained.

And, said Hanafi Mahmoud, owner of a number of fishing boats, fishing should be prohibited on the coasts of Alexandria from mid-June to mid-September, the breeding season. In the meantime, Mahmoud suggested that an agreement should be made with Libya allowing Egyptian fishermen to fish off Libyan coasts during these three months.

Reported by
Ihab El-Dessouki,
Shadi Tahan and
Shoreen Abdel-Razek



Source: Alexandria Magazine for Agricultural Research

Al-Ahram Weekly

Bullets for ballots

As the Israeli elections draw near, Peres has found the temptation to win votes through violence too much to resist. Plagued by a dovish image in the eyes of Israeli right-wingers, he has begun to sharpen his teeth — this time on Lebanese soil, washing away the bitter aftertaste of passivity with the blood of innocent civilians.

Israel's air strikes against Hezbollah targets in Lebanon may be deemed, in Peres' mind, as an attempt to secure Israel's borders against hostile elements, but are actually reminiscent of a dangerous game of chess where the future of the peace process and the territorial sovereignty of Lebanon are held in check. It is, in short, difficult to see them as more than the contributing factor to the largest exodus of Lebanese civilians since 1993.

Although Israeli helicopters hit a Syrian military encampment near Beirut, and although Peres has repeatedly assured the international community of his commitment to peace, no apology has been offered. Acts like these are in no way assurances of a commitment to peace.

But for Peres, talk of conflict resolution is just that — talk. Little else in his actions have pointed to the fact that he is seriously assessing the situation and seeking a strategic diplomatic resolution to a decades-old dispute with his neighbours. Instead, Peres has resorted to scaling off the Palestinian self-rule territories, striking a security deal with Turkey, and most recently, using terrorism as an excuse to flex his country's military muscle on another's soil. This may win him votes in the May elections, but it will not win him any favours in the peace process.

After years of resorting to military manoeuvres, with negligible results, in an attempt to strike a blow at groups like Hezbollah, has it not become clear to Israel that ideology cannot be dispelled by bullets. Rather than resorting to violence, it would be more prudent for Israel to wholeheartedly embrace the current drive for peace, set aside its arms and support the fledgling Palestinian state. If peace is to come about in the region, it will be through political and economic stability, not military might, an option which has failed many times in the past. This is clearly one case where the best defence is not a strong offense.

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Overseas offices

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The fruits of despair

Ibrahim Nafie
despairs of the
prospects for
peace given
Israel's barbaric
attacks on Lebanon
and the Palestinian
people



draw is that, for Israel, peace is a tactical manoeuvre, its aims no different from war. And what are those aims? The imposition of Israeli hegemony and the denial of the rights — indeed the very existence — of the Arabs.

Israel must also realise that, by waging its military campaign in Lebanon and by its economic warfare and police repression in the West Bank, it is sending a message, not only to those in the direct line of fire, but to all people in the Arab world. Any attempt to portray this aggressive war as a limited counter-terrorist action, are belied by the duration and scope of its operations.

Israel justifies its actions as a response to the actions of a handful of militants. This, in itself, constitutes an admission that it is practicing state terrorism. In effect, it is punishing people who do not even support the actions of the extremists that it is purporting to act against. And there is absolutely no comparison between the losses inflicted upon Israel by Arab terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah and the human and material losses Israel has inflicted upon the Palestinian and Lebanese people in revenge.

What, some observers in the Arab world and in the West is the grossly disproportionate scale of the Israeli reaction. If a single car bomb crosses into Israel, Israel finds in that sufficient justification to bomb an entire country, to evacuate its population from a portion of its territory and to kill thousands of innocent civilians. This is what opens Israel, in its practice of state terrorism, to the accusation of racism. People speak glibly of a tooth for a tooth. But the fact is that thousands of Arab lives count for nothing when compared with a single Jewish life.

What is Israel up to in the West Bank and Lebanon? It is bombarding civilian targets at random, killing peaceful civilians by the hundreds. Unrestrained in its brutality, the Israeli government continues to announce that it will bomb anything it sees fit.

The Arab world is in an uproar over these savage acts, committed with the tacit complicity of some major powers. Israel, and those countries that have given Israel the green light to unleash this maelstrom upon the Arab people in occupied Palestine and Lebanon, should understand certain fundamental truths.

Its actions, which violate all principles of international law and all conventions and morals of the international order, have jeopardised everything that has been accomplished in the peace process up till now. The savagery with which Israel is conducting its military operations in Lebanon threatens to abort all peaceful negotiations, propelling the region back to square one — open conflict and unrestrained violence. This is the only predictable result, as long as Israel, abetted by others, persists in its contempt for peace and continues to act as though it has carte blanche, exempting it from all international laws and principles, so that it can devastate an Arab country and subject an Arab people to blockade and starvation.

The military operations in Lebanon and the collective punishment of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories make it impossible to control the reactions not only of Arab people but of many Arab states. Through its actions, Israel has intensified the conflict, involving ever broader segments of Arab society who are appalled by such unbounded

and ferocious cruelty. The consequences of millions of Arabs cannot tolerate such a blatant disdain for human dignity.

In the West Bank, Gaza and Lebanon Israel has escalated the conflict into a question of life or death for the Arabs. Until recently, it has been felt that the Arab-Israeli conflict could be contained and resolved through a negotiated peace settlement that might serve as a model of self-interest, restraint, clarity of vision and constructive follow-through. But now Arabs everywhere are stunned, not least by the viciousness and arbitrariness of Israel's brutality which is threatening to cast the region back to the Middle Ages.

Political observers, even those close to Israel, have likened Israel's military operations in Lebanon and its repressive measures in the West Bank and Gaza to the genocide of Native and African Americans and to the concentration camps and desolate

ervations to which Native Americans have been confined.

They are shocked by the impunity with which the Israeli army, with the tacit consent of the West, bombs civilian targets in Lebanon, including ambulances, peoples' homes, the children and the elderly. It has cordoned off the Occupied Territories and subjected their inhabitants to a campaign of starvation.

One purpose of this manic frenzy of violence is to cater to Israeli public opinion in the run up to the general elections. What it betrays is the depth of hatred harboured towards the Arabs by the people of Israel. And the only possible outcome of such will be to augment bitterness and rancour and fuel the fires of vengeance among Arab peoples. History provides us with similar instances, in Vietnam and South Africa, where people were subjected to such injustices.

Israeli claims that its actions are intended to punish terrorists are nothing

but hollow excuses. Those being killed and wounded are neither freedom fighters exercising their legitimate right to resist occupation nor armed political militants opposed to the peace process. Israel's own reports show that the victims of its aggression are innocent civilians who had hoped for peace. Through its barbarity Israel is transforming such hope into despair, fuelling a response that will consist of armed resistance and terrorism.

To attack an entire people in order to pressure militant groups may yield some gains for Israel in the short term. To persist in such actions, though, will only sow the seeds for further resistance. What else can possibly result from subjecting human beings to such arbitrary violence, humiliation and oppression?

What the Israelis must realise is that they cannot express hopes for peace by making war on innocent civilians. The only conclusion the victims can

Suicide bombing vs electronic shelling

The devastation being rained down on Lebanon by Israeli war planes and helicopter gunships in an unremitting onslaught which began with last Thursday's precisely targeted missile strike against an apartment in the heart of Beirut, said to be the command centre of Hezbollah, has introduced a new form of electronic warfare into the region.

Two weeks earlier, *Newsweek* published a story comparing Israel to California's Silicon Valley, the computer industry capital of the world, and describing it as less a potential rival to than a powerful satellite of the valley. This description assumes that discrepancies in time and space between these two centres of state-of-the-art electronics no longer exist. Today Israel is conducting an electronic war which, by being totally unhindered by constraints of space, transcends the land dimension. The argument that Israel has consistently advanced to justify holding on to Arab land is that handing it back would threaten its security. Now that it has displayed the ability to ensure its security irrespective of its occupation of land, it can no longer use this argument without provoking even deeper Arab hostility which, in the absence of technological parity, will express itself through any available means, including what Israel labels terrorism. Thus Israel's obsession with its security is producing results that are just the opposite of what its government claims to be aiming for.

Electronic warfare depends on technology, a science that allows the country mastering it to avoid exposing its armed forces to the casualties of combat. While conventional warfare might not be capable of facing up to the challenge, the same does not hold true of warfare waged by *fedayin* willing to sacrifice their lives. Indomitable human will is still stronger than artificial intelligence. On the other hand, Israel's claim that its "clean" electronic war distinguishes between the guilty and the innocent is patently invalidated by scores of harrowing images of civilians maimed and killed by its recent raids, including four children who were riding in an ambulance rocked by an Israeli helicopter.

Moreover, Israel is placing its Arab peace partners in an embarrassing position by requiring them to condemn terrorism at a time suicide bombings seem to be the most effective way of preventing the Middle East peace process from consecrating a regional order that wide sections of Arab public opinion fear is being tailored to fit Israel's needs at their expense. Indeed, it is unrealistic for Israel to expect the Lebanese to condemn acts of resistance by Hezbollah, even if they are supported and financed by Iran. Hezbollah guerrillas enjoy wide popularity as freedom fighters resisting foreign occupation of their land, a practice condemned not only by the UN Charter but also, in the specific case of Lebanon, by Security Council Resolution 425. Thus Israel's gamble that the massive exodus of refugees from southern Lebanon will pressure both the Lebanese and Syrian governments into cracking down on Hezbollah, could well backfire and bring the already faltering peace process to a final halt.

As President Mubarak rightly

pointed out during President Chirac's recent visit to Egypt, it would be dangerous to freeze the peace process until the end of the Israeli elections next month, because the vacuum could produce effects and counter-effects that might irreparably damage the prospects of peace in the Middle East. What is now happening in Lebanon is not the only manifestation that this process may already be underway. Another is the recent military agreement between Turkey and Israel, and their decision to hold joint military exercises. This agreement is another expression of Israel's bid to ensure its security irrespective of its occupation of land. Israel can claim that in an age of supersonic military aircraft, air manoeuvres need wide spaces, such as Turkey's Anatolia, which Israel's limited territorial airspace cannot provide. On the other hand, it can be argued that Ankara welcomed the Israeli proposal in the hope that cooperation with Israel could help it face the growing Islamic challenge at home. What is certain is that Israel's newly-acquired right to station military aircraft in Turkey will enhance its logistical ability to strike at Iran, Iraq and/or Syria, thus introducing a dangerous new dimension to Middle-Easternism.

The word Middle-Easternism was originally coined to define a political space that not only included Israel with the Arab Mashreq states but also a number of non-Arab Islamic states, notably Tur-

key, Iran and perhaps eventually the Islamic republics of the former Soviet Union. It was also assumed that the various states making up this political space would be linked economically through a Middle East market. Now this space is acquiring a military dimension with the emergence of an Israeli-Turkish axis at the very time the peace process is faltering.

The new military arrangement between Israel and Turkey, whose relations with the Arab world have always been ambivalent, is bound to be seen by the Arabs as a hostile act incompatible with the peace process to which, according to Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, they are likely to react with comparable hostility. Moreover, in the present crisis situation throughout the region, the Israeli-Turkish axis is certain to compound other latent crises, such as the growing water shortage problem affecting Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Israel and the Kurdish crisis affecting Turkey, Iraq, Iran and, to a lesser extent, Syria. Such problems could bring about radical realignments, such as rapprochement between certain Arab Gulf states and Iran or a reconciliation between some Arab states and Iraq.

The Sharm El-Sheikh summit was held to demonstrate the international community's vigilance in the face of terrorism and its refusal to allow it to impose a veto on the peace process. In a few days' time, the foreign ministers of the countries which took part in the summit will be meeting to follow up the implementation of its resolutions. However, if they are to be true to the declared aim of the summit, they would do well to re-evaluate these resolutions in the light of all the anti-peace developments that have rocked the region since they were passed.

In the absence of guarantees

By Naguib Mahfouz



I was delighted by the recent Cairo announcement declaring Africa a nuclear-free area. I have opposed nuclear weapons for as long as I remember, not least for the simple reason that they harm the possessor as much as they harm anyone. They constitute the most desperate instruments of revenge, capable of destroying everything. Nuclear weapons are the only weapons that affect the entire population of the globe — simply remember Chernobyl, a limited disaster that occurred a decade ago but which continues to affect people thousands of miles away from the former Soviet Union.

There can be no absolute guarantee that nuclear weapons will not be used in a moment of anger or of desperation. There can be no guarantee that nuclear weapons will be kept out of the hands of the unscrupulous, the irresponsible, or those whose stock in trade is terror. Though there is no limit to the horrors the use of such weapons can bring, neither can we guarantee that people will be cowed by this fact. There are, and always will be, those who care nothing about the consequences of their actions.

We face a very simple fact. We can never be entirely sure that weapons of mass destruction do not fall into the hands of the irresponsible, the nightmare scenario being, of course, that a terrorist group obtains a nuclear weapon and threatens to use it, or worse still, actually does. The only absolute guarantee of avoiding such a scenario is to abandon nuclear weapons all together.

Nuclear weapons should gradually be discarded until the world is completely free of their evil. What pleases me about the Cairo declaration is that our continent should have taken the first step and declared itself nuclear free. How I wish that our neighbours would follow suit.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salim.

Not into salvation

The Arabs have reached another boiling point, writes **Hassan Hanafi**. We stand bewildered, dazzled by the past. Meanwhile, the world beyond is forming itself anew

we live and with which a legacy from the past and ideas transmitted from the West interact. This reality is composed of colloquial images and popular customs, artistic tastes and literary creations, folk narratives, songs and oral histories; it also comprises poverty and bitterness, violence and repression. In our coffee houses, on our doorsteps and pavements, in all our public places of congregation, the stories of the Prophet's companions, import science and technology, and the legends of Abu Zaid Al-Hilali indistinguishably intermingle.

Our attitude toward history is the simplest and most straightforward. Contemporary Arab culture is living a curious dichotomy. The Arab and Islamic heritage originated under circumstances that no longer exist; yet one of the symptoms of the contemporary crisis in Arab culture is the way we continue to think as victors, even when faced with the reality of defeat. We imagine the world from the perspective of "the best of nations sent to people", yet from the perspective of foreign occupation, partition, subordination, backwardness, apathy and alienation. What we learn and teach is one thing; the way we think and act is another. We think in terms of salvation, and denounce those led into temptation; we internalise the ruling ideology and blinker ourselves against opposition. The religious curriculum is based on the divinity and metaphysics of the exclusion of the humanities and tangible realities.

We continue to teach Islamic jurisprudence with regard to spoils of war, slaves, chattel, women and the people of the book. But the world has changed. There are no longer spoils of war, slavery has been abolished and all citizens are equal regardless of race, ethnic origin, creed or gender. Our legislation rigidly adheres to scripture to the detriment of our national interests, although our national interests should provide the source of legislation. Our traditional sciences of Qur'anic exegesis, documentation of Prophetic tradition, and Islamic jurisprudence have not undergone the slightest transformation, while the natural and applied sciences have no place in our consciousness whatsoever. The crisis of Arab culture, in short, is that our spirit is in one era while our body lives in another.

Our attitude toward the West is equally easy to define. Our

transmission of Western culture began with the British colonisation of India. The Arab cultural awakening, therefore, is linked to colonialism; the modernisation of the Arab world was effected by a relatively small westernised minority. As the peoples from the West vied with the traditional heritage, there emerged a cultural dichotomy: a Westernised minority ruling class versus the ruled majority, steeped in tradition. When the indigenous elite suffered defeat, the blame was cast on its ties with the West and the masses rebelled against it.

Our relation to the West has always been topside. They create and produce, we imitate and consume. They are the perpetual teachers; we, the perpetual students. Generation after generation, this asymmetry has generated an inferiority complex, forever exacerbated by the fact that their innovations progress at a faster pace than we can absorb. The result — a widening gap that leaves us stunned and relegates us to the margins of history.

The process of transmitting aspects of Western culture has been perpetually thwarted. Imported ideas are uprooted from the soil that engendered them, and implanted in alien soil. They are isolated from the context of their origins and become an anomaly in a hostile host. Ideas imported from the West, which have had their indigenous advocates, have consistently met with staunch resistance from the defenders of traditional culture. No attempts at outwringing their growth on Arab soil have succeeded: neither Arab liberalism, nor Arab socialism or Marxism. Religious reform remains the only channel through which to effect change.

As for our perception of our contemporary reality, in which we stand at the intersection between our past and our future and in which our perception of ourselves vies with our perception of others, it is formulated by many factors: political rhetoric, our standards of living, current events. The media has the most powerful sway over people's minds, yet it presents a curious conglomeration. It presents the ruling ideology in condensed form, religious programming echoes the political media, international news is followed by the daytime soaps, news of Bosnia and Palestine are interrupted by

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Belated sensitivity

Why the flood of current concern over the environment?

What leads industrialised countries to convene conferences, to sign agreements, to offer loans and to hold exhibitions and endless discussions on the environment whenever and wherever possible? Clearly the wealthy industrialised nations are sensitive to the gravity of the situation, and are well aware of the urgency with which environmental issues should be tackled. How else can we explain the mountains of cash and the huge sums of money being invested in environmental research?

Developed societies have satiated themselves on the fruits of modern industry. Now scientific research is being directed, on the one hand, towards improving mankind's relationship with his environment, and on the other is providing a rationale for abandoning the superficial materialism that has been such a dominant characteristic of the modern age. Suddenly we have discovered that natural resources can be exhausted, and that unrestricted industrial activity causes irreparable damage to man and to his physical surroundings.

It was natural, then, that the advanced industrialised nations should have begun to take account of the damage that their industrial-military complexes have wreaked on the fragile ecosystem of our globe. It would, in any case, have been impossible to ignore Chernobyl, the decimation of the Amazon rain forest, the downpour of acid posing as rain, the distribution of foodstuffs contaminated either by pesticides or by frightening new diseases like the 'mad cow' epidemic. Poisonous refuse and industrial waste pollute vast tracts of our environment.

The aid offered by the developed industrial countries to the developing world, earmarked for combating environmental problems is, though, like all aid, geared towards benefiting the donor countries. For wherever the dumping ground, however far away, the industrial nations have realised that their pollutants will come back to haunt them. They are already haunting the peoples of the Third World.

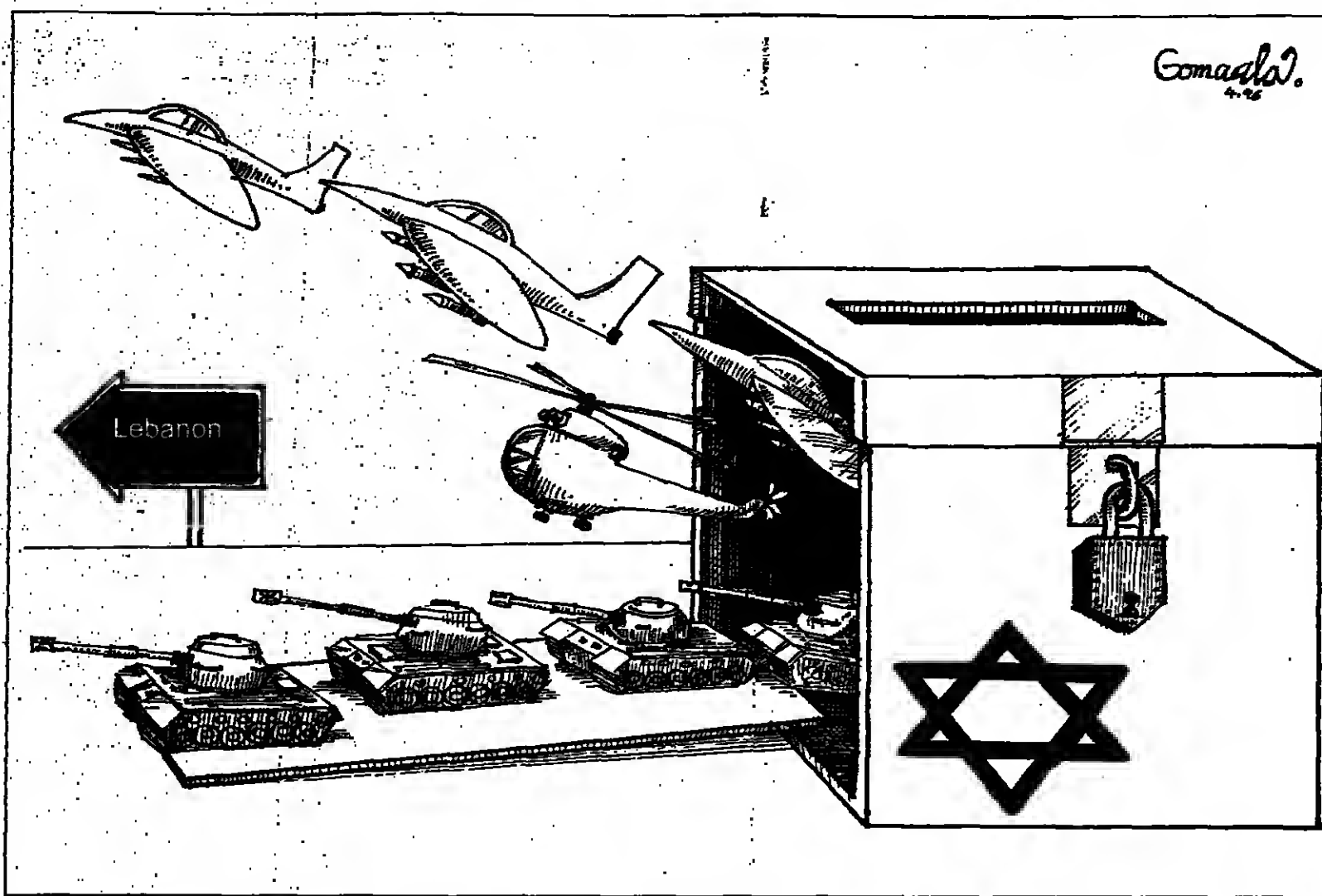
No matter what checks the industrialised nations place on industrial or agricultural products, or on the movement of people, they are unable to curb the movement of air, water and wind. Viruses and microbes are no respecters of national boundaries or customs officials.

Commercial and economic activity has come to represent the sole basis of progress. Such activity dominates political, military and scientific considerations. Fortunately environmental issues have now found a commercial decision-making. The industrialised nations, as they lay down the specifications for fabricated and semi-fabricated goods, let environmental concerns weigh heavy on their decisions. The average consumer is today increasingly aware of the necessity for industrial products and foodstuffs to conform to sound environmental criteria, and consumer protection agencies act as the channels through which pressure is applied on producers to conform to certain standards.

And it is conforming to internationally recognised standards of production that is the greatest challenge currently facing Egyptian production. Our industries must show that they can match and compete with others for a share of the international market, without cutting corners that might lead to environmental degradation.

Apology

Al-Ahram Weekly sincerely apologises to its readers for an error which occurred in Salama A. Salama's column *Close up*, entitled 'Sowing a cultivated peace', and published in issue 266 (28 March-April). In several places the words 'the culture of peace' appeared as 'the culture of Islam'.



Soapbox

Diversionsary tactics

Israel's military aggression against Lebanon has succeeded, for the moment, in diverting attention away from the recently concluded Israeli-Turkish pact. Although the precise details of the pact have not been made public, the Israeli press cited a statement made by the Turkish minister of defence to the effect that Israel and Turkey have signed an agreement in accordance with which Israeli military aircraft will be permitted to use Turkish military bases and airspace for training purposes.

Certainly, Washington was instrumental in pushing Turkey to conclude this agreement, the most important goal of which is to throw the region into disarray and to compound the pressures on Syria, thus simultaneously fulfilling both Turkey's and Israel's interests with regard to Syria.

The Turkish-Israeli pact aroused the dismay of the Egyptian government. Foreign Minister Amr Moussa announced that the pact gives Israel a distinct strategic advantage and augments pressures on Syria by providing the Israeli air force with Turkish air bases located north of Syria's borders.

Perhaps the Katyusha missiles fired from the Hezbollah bases in Lebanon against northern Israel on 9 February were in fact Syria's indirect response to the Turkish-Israeli pact. Around the same time, it was announced that Egypt and Syria are seeking to conduct joint training manoeuvres and conclude mutual pacts — news which has prompted some commentators to portray these developments as a repeat performance of the 1967 scenario.

But Israel's savage invasion of Lebanon has diverted attention away from the Tel Aviv-Ankara agreement. It has also reshuffled many of the cards: the elections, the negotiations, Egyptian-Israeli relations and, finally, Syria's position in Lebanon, where Syria wants to prove that it, and not Israel, still calls the shots.

This week's soapbox speaker is a senior columnist in Al-Ahram.



Salah Montasser

Development, the liberal way (2)

Will democratisation delay economic reform, or sweep the Islamists to power? Said El-Naggari, in the second and final part of his study of development and democracy, ponders the question from a liberal perspective

The political constraints on economic reform were analysed in a previous article. Let us look at the other side of the coin, namely, the extent to which economic considerations may impede political reform in Egypt.

Prior to the implementation of the economic reform programme, the Egyptian economy was suffering from severe imbalances and distortions. The political system stands now where our economy stood in the years preceding economic reform. It is a victim of glaring short-comings. This is perhaps recognised throughout the political spectrum. What is at issue is not the principle but the right timing to engage the process of political reform. Two arguments are invoked in support of postponement. The first is that a greater measure of democratisation may put the process of economic reform at risk. The second is that, given the strength of the Islamist political movement and the weakness of other political parties, democratisation might well pave the way for an Islamist takeover, with dire consequences for democracy and progress.

With respect to the first argument, it is not clear why a greater measure of democratisation would result in a setback to the economic reform programme. The opposite would seem to be true. Democratic values and principles create conditions favourable to economic development. Democracy means government by laws, not by persons; it implies that economic, social and political institutions have a life of their own and can be neither destroyed nor encroached upon. It also means inviolability of the individual, his or her home and private property, free press, independent judiciary, accountability of public officials, transparency in the conduct of government business and participation in decision-making.

All these values and principles are indispensable for stability, creativity, risk-taking and a pervasive sense of equity which constitute the underpinning, if not the lifeblood, of sustainable development. More specifically, democratic values and principles exercise their impact on development through three principal channels: The investment climate, predictability and innovation, or the spirit of enterprise.

The term, the investment climate, is used to refer to the sum total of policies, institutions and the general economic and political conditions which make a given country a more or less attractive place for investment. There can be little doubt that the presence of a well-established democracy is one of the important ingredients of a favourable investment climate. It is not by accident that a high

proportion of world savings gravitates towards such countries as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. One basic feature that is common to all is a solidly democratic system of government.

Obviously, other factors are involved in making these countries a safe haven for world savings, such as the banking system, well-developed money and capital markets, and the quality of macro-economic policies. But without a democratic system of government, other factors would not have sufficed to give them such pre-eminence in the global capital markets.

This creates a congenial environment for long-term investment decisions. In a democratic system, the rules of the game are well known in advance. This permits individuals and projects to operate within clearly defined parameters. The absence or vagueness of such rules induces private investors to seek self-protection by resorting to short-term investments which can be liquidated at a relatively short notice. Alternatively, savings are put in liquid or semi-liquid assets. In consequence, productive investments which require a long-term view remain either unfunded or underfunded unless they are undertaken by public authorities.

There are reasons to believe that democracy and respect for human rights help create an environment conducive to an innovative and enterprising spirit. The opposite is true of totalitarian systems of government, where the individual is made to feel like a small cog in a huge machine. Such a sense of unimportance and helplessness cannot fail to kill the spirit of innovation and enterprise, and encourage conformity and anti-social patterns of behaviour.

The case of the four tigers is usually invoked to argue against democratisation in Egypt. It is pointed out that the outstanding performance of these countries took place under a political system which was strongly authoritarian. What this means is that the absence of democracy in the East Asian countries historically was not detrimental to the cause of economic progress. There is nothing, however, in this argument to invalidate the statement that the economic performance of the same countries could have been just as good, if not better, had there been more democracy. Nor does this support the contention that a movement from an authoritarian to a democratic system of government harms economic reform.

The fact of the matter is that the case of the four tigers and other Asian countries remains strictly exceptional. In the overwhelming majority of developing countries, the absence of a democratic system of government during the post-

World War period spelled disaster for development. The end result was typically widespread corruption, white elephant projects and stagnation, if not actual decline, in the standard of living.

Looking more closely at the case of the four tigers, it is possible to point to certain features which explain the unique character of their experience. They are culture-specific in the sense that they belong to the Confucian culture. Politically, they might have lacked the attributes of a full-fledged democracy but they did have, for the most part, a free and independent press, strong opposition parties and a certain measure of accountability and transparency. Finally, the existence of a highly successful economic system alongside an authoritarian political system gave rise to varying degrees of tension and strife which led eventually to the emergence of democratic regimes in most of these countries.

According to the second argument, democratisation will pave the way for an Islamist takeover. One of the major political challenges facing Egypt in the years to come is that posed by Islamic fundamentalism. It is hardly necessary to point out that this growing force has far-reaching implications for future development, not only in Egypt but in the Arab world at large. Nor can there be any doubt that it derives most of its dynamism from perceived and real grievances against our economic and political systems. On the economic side, one may point to large-scale unemployment together with crushing poverty alongside extravagant wealth. On the political side, reference may be made to the exclusionary character of the political system in addition to the perception of widespread corruption. As long as such grievances persist, political Islam is bound to win over more adherents and sympathisers.

Islamic fundamentalism, however, is not of one mind as to objectives and methods. There exists an extremist fringe which seeks to return to the institutions, symbols, and system of government of early Islam and does not hesitate to use force and terror to that end. These elements are obviously not qualified to participate as a legitimate party in the political life of the country. They are outlaws and should be dealt with as such as long as they resort to force or the threat of force in furthering their goals.

The mainstream of political Islam, however, would seem to be of a different stripe. They repudiate the methods used by the extremists and profess a strict adherence to constitutional norms and methods. Presently, they are precluded from having their own political party and

can only participate in political life by allying themselves to other parties. Once they allied themselves with the Waqf, now they cooperate with the Labour Party. They resent their exclusion from the political game in spite of the fact that they enjoy a respectable presence at the grassroots level.

The mainstream moderate elements of political Islam pose a difficult dilemma. On one hand, it is neither normal nor fair to ignore such a political force and forbid it from playing a role in the political life of the country. On the other, it is perfectly understandable to be suspicious of a movement that invokes the authority of God in support of its political programme. They are justifiably suspected of professing democracy only as means of reaching power. Once this is achieved, they will show their true colour as sworn enemies of democracy. In support of this contention it is pointed out that history does not provide a single case of a theocratic government, Islamic or otherwise, which abides by the rules of democracy. Nor can one draw much comfort from the examples of contemporary Islamic governments. Neither the Iranian nor the Sudanese government can claim to be democratic by any stretch of the imagination.

While such fears and suspicions cannot be lightly dismissed, they cannot be used as arguments to exclude political Islam indefinitely from playing a role. It would seem more tenable to engage the moderate elements in a dialogue with the purpose of ensuring their adherence to constitutionalism in both word and deed.

The starting point is to get them to clarify their political programme. So far, they have drawn substantial benefits from the vagueness and ambiguity of what they plan to do in the event they reach power. Their programme is limited to the slogan 'Islam is the solution', and to the assertion that their goals are innocuous and above-board. Obviously, however, the slogan is capable of different and even conflicting interpretations. It could be construed along the lines of the extremist model. It is also possible to give it an enlightened interpretation that is consistent with development and progress. What is implied by the slogan 'Islam is the solution' can only emerge through dialogue. The aim should be to hammer out a national charter binding on all political parties, Islamic as well as secular and based, inter alia, on the following five principles.

The programme of any authorised political party should not contain provisions which nullify the basic tenets of democracy, in particular: a multi-party system including the right to establish secret parties; the right to free speech and dissent; freedom of worship; rotation of

political power through a fair and transparent election process; equality of all citizens before the law irrespective of race, religion or sex; women's right to participate fully in public life; freedom of the press; an independent judiciary, etc.

The interpretation of Islam should not be inconsistent with basic human rights as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all other conventions, declarations and protocols issued by the United Nations and its specialised agencies in this field.

A distinction should be made between a constitutional principle which is applicable to all citizens and the programme of a political party which expresses the views and preferences of a certain group of citizens. A constitutional principle should therefore be free of any religious or ideological colour that puts a certain group of citizens at a disadvantage. Religious or ideological orientations can only have a place in the programme of political parties provided they do not deny or nullify the basic principles of democracy.

A majority that has the right and power to manage and legislate in a democracy cannot be based on religion, race or colour. A white majority in a given country cannot on that basis legislate to the detriment of a non-white minority. Similarly, a Christian majority is not entitled to legislate to the detriment of a non-Christian minority. By the same token, an Islamic majority as such cannot discriminate against a non-Islamic minority. The only valid majority in the democratic sense of the term is that which is open to all citizens. It is susceptible to become a minority according to changes in the views and preferences of public opinion.

The overriding imperative for Egypt and the Islamic world is to overcome poverty, underdevelopment and an unhealthy dependency on foreign powers. The achievement of these objectives is contingent upon the readiness to accept the findings and recommendations of physical as well as social sciences even if these stand in conflict with the conventional interpretation of Islam. If political Islam proves ready to accept and abide by these principles there is no reason why it should not be admitted into the mainstream of political life on the same footing and with the same rights and privileges as other parties. Failing to accept these principles would vindicate the fears and suspicions of those who accuse Islamists of playing the game of democracy only as a means to capture political power.

The writer is a professor of economics and chairman of the New Civic Forum.

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

Because we are social animals, because learning and consciousness — not blind instinct — determine our actions, we are imbued with certain fundamental traits that allow us to function as human beings. Our capacity for empathy, our ability to feel the suffering or joy of others as if it were our own, is one such fundamental human trait. Our feeling for our children, the way they move, their physical shape immediately triggers feelings of tenderness, the desire to protect and love, in an adult human, is another. But a fundamental irony of the human condition is that, as social beings, humans can be socialised out of their fundamental nature to become, not animals, but monsters.

The photo of a crying father holding his two dead children in his arms; a little girl lying as if asleep, her head propped on the window sill of an ambulance bombed by the Israelis; reports of booby-trapped toys dropped onto south Lebanese towns and villages from Israeli planes — these abominations never evoke the sense of horror and outrage with which the Western media is beset whenever an Israeli, even a soldier, is killed. When an Israeli is killed we are offered his name, photos of him as a schoolboy, photos of his wedding, more photos of his bereaved wife, children, and aged parents. We are told the story of his life. And in the midst of it all, cries for revenge — 'kill the Arabs' — are reported, already justified. Israel's war of savagery in south Lebanon divests the 'peace process' of the last vestiges of

moral rhetoric that have been such a fundamental feature of the 'peace processing' discourse. Half a million people are driven from their homes, civilian non-combatants massacred indiscriminately, fields and houses destroyed on a massive scale in what *The Independent* described in a banner headline as 'Israel's bitter vengeance'. But what, exactly, is Israel avenging? Hezbollah fighters were striking at military targets of an occupation force, Israel 'retaliated' by striking at civilian targets, killing a 14-year-old boy. It was only then that Hezbollah struck back, firing Katyusha rockets into northern Israel, most of which, according to Israeli statements, fell into fields. They killed not a single Israeli, and injured only a handful.

Why, then, is Clinton not paying a 'solidarity visit' to Beirut? Why is he not shedding angry tears and, in a voice cracked with emotion, vowing that America will not stand by while Lebanese children are killed by terrorist bombs and missiles? Why is the US not signing a defence pact with Hezbollah for 'bravely and steadfastly facing up to terrorism'?

How many Arab children must be killed and maimed for the Western media — not Peres, not Clinton — to be driven to the sense of outrage and horror demonstrated at the time of the Hamas bombings?

Numbers do not count when the dead and maimed are Arabs. Our dead, old and infant alike, are nameless bodies which may evoke a measured pity, but never anger or outrage at those who, without the jus-

tification of destitution, desperation and humiliation, coldly and boastfully slaughter and cripple innocent children. The editors of the *Washington Post* are totally unmoved by the images of death and destruction. 'No government can stand by while terrorists rocket its citizens' bones across an international frontier. In that bottom-line sense, Israel is entirely justified in replying to the Syria-backed, Lebanon-based Hezbollah's recent attacks,' the editors calmly declare. They admit that the bombing of an ambulance carrying children was 'a horrifying account' — but after all, it was 'unintended', we are reassured.

The peace process is nothing but a conquerors' peace, the Palestinians, Lebanese and Arabs nothing but captives of Israeli security, superiority and dominance. The mere fact that Peres and Clinton's prospective votes need to be drenched in the blood of Arab children is testimony to the fundamental nature of the Pax Americana-Israelis in the Middle East.

It was in the aftermath of the October 1973 War that the 'peace process' came to replace the 'peace settlement', which not long after 1967 had replaced the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions. The political implications of the new American discourse were not difficult to unravel: to eradicate Soviet influence in the region; to coax along the elements of 'moderation' in previously 'radical' Arab states; to dismantle the post-October War Arab front, and deal separately with each Arab party, playing them one against the others; and to overcome the so-

called psychological barrier: i.e. to make the Arabs forget their fundamental rights, rewrite their own history and reformulate their collective memory. All this needed a process, the basic law of which being the distribution of American-Israeli rewards and punishments.

Yet the peace processing discourse has another, no less important feature, an ideological one. This lies in its astounding ability to articulate the realities of power with some of the most high-sounding, tear-jerking moral rhetoric that has suffused any modern political conflict. The Nobel prizes, the celebrations on the White House lawn, the abundance of 'peace in our time' speeches, all reached a climax of sorts since Rabin's funeral and beyond. A conquerors' peace, the pacification of Palestinians and Arabs, is thus proclaimed throughout the world as the dividing line between morality and immorality, good and evil, the peace-makers and terrorists — the enemies of peace.

It is interesting, therefore, that, under what are ultimately selfish electoral considerations, this discourse is cracking, its true nature disclosed. Human beings, including the Palestinians and Arabs, are not Pavlov's dogs. American-Israeli rewards and punishments, however brutal and apparently irreversible, will not deny us our fundamental humanity. Defeated we may be. Overwhelmed by the realities of overwhelming force, we may also be. But can we forget the names of our murdered children?

Accounts of murder

[illegible]

Dehumanising the humanities

Defa'an 'an Al-Madiah wa Al-Tarikh (In defence of materialism and history). Sadiq Jalal Al-Azm. Al-Fikr Al-Jadid Publishing House, Beirut, 1995



Victims of fate: Queen Victoria and her Indian servant Abdul-Karim — discrete personalities with a history that does not overlap

Contemporary Arab thought resounds to the echoes of ongoing philosophical debates in the West, debates that characterise objectivity, rationalism and historicism as archaic. The present century, once referred to as the century of science, site of an unprecedented technological and scientific revolution, is reaching its end accompanied by philosophies that question the validity of science to uncover objective truth.

Scientific paradigms, it is said, are self-reflexive. They are closed systems that cannot be tested in any objective reality. But neither can they be evaluated comparatively in an attempt to measure their validity vis-a-vis external facts as Thomas Kuhn claims in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

There is a degree of correspondence, certainly. Al-Azm argues, between Kuhn's ideas and Derrida's deconstructionism and Foucault's discourse theory in the humanities. The physical sciences, according to today's dominant philosophical notions, represent nothing more than a compilation of mathematical symbols that do not, in themselves, reveal anything about the world. They are abstract symbols and mental equations. Equally, in the humanities, the validation of the truth of any given discourse cannot be determined beyond that discourse. The truth of the discourse is akin to a rhetorical imposition. We believe that any given discourse is true because we do not have an alternative. Truth, then, is what we fancy about any given discourse. The philosophical arena is dominated by a radical scepticism. The very fact that towering scientific and technological achievements are produced and dominated by a very small number of states, and for the benefit of an even smaller minority, makes philosophy declare science unrelated to objectivity. Simultaneously there is a denial of the possibility of generalising scientific knowledge within other disciplines.

The epistemology furnished by contemporary philosophy is a theory isolated from the world. It is self-negating. Epistemology is itself demoted. Thus, philosophy is left with the analysis of the language of science without any claim to contributing to the formulation of a world view. The dominant philosophies diverge from the project of the enlightenment and the trust invested in the power of reason.

Here is a paradox. While super-powers and giant corporations invest billions in scientific research covering everything from outer space to the pore of an atom, using the results of the research to further both profit and hegemony, the philosophical consciousness of the role and

function of science attempts to proscribe the limits of scientific knowledge. This consciousness imprisons science within the domain of the study of external phenomena without studying the essence of such phenomena, their similarity and external consistency, as a means of systematisation.

As a consequence philosophy is left with a single task — to analyse the language of science with the aim of filtering out 'metaphysical' questions and considerations. And what has come to be characterised as metaphysics? Anything claiming an objective knowledge of the world.

Thus knowledge itself is reduced to a closed circle of linguistic and mathematical expressions, with very little possibility of escaping the boundaries imposed. Consequently, there is little hope that scientific knowledge might be generalised in other fields of social activity. There is, today, a great deal of talk about the relationship between modern physics and oriental mysticism. Individual scientists talk about the correspondence between science and eastern cosmologies — their comments are picked up by philosophers who then see in modern physics a validation of mysticism.

The tendency to escapism is very clear. The problems of reality are deserted in favour of mathematical equations, linguistic analysis, and discourses which become self-sufficient, closed systems. The dialectical relationship between the structure and the process of becoming, the synchronic and diachronic, is absent. All life mechanisms, along with those pertaining to man and society, are reduced to abstract forms and formal relationships which convert all that pertains to existence into signs, which themselves refer to other signs. The end is scepticism and agnosticism.

Al-Azm concludes his analysis of the way in which contemporary philosophy treats materialism by arguing that the negation of science and technology as an aid in understanding either the world or the individual is a result of the fact that they are controlled by a narrow social group. Science and technology are monopolised by those who use them to exploit, pollute and produce weapons of mass destruction. But this does not mean that they cannot contribute to freedom and prosperity. It is the contradiction between what science and technology can produce, and what is being produced, that leads to the dominance of scepticism and agnosticism in contemporary philosophy.

Moving from materialism to philosophies of history, Al-Azm notes a tendency to renege on earlier rationalism. History, today, is considered by many as a stream of irra-

tional events, lacking structure or imperatives. It cannot be interpreted; it can only be understood. The task of the historian is to revisit, adequately, the experiences of the past. History thus becomes a descriptive psychology.

Agnosticism in the social field, as in the physical sciences, denies the possibility of any in-depth knowledge of social phenomena, their essence, or any regularity in their course. Historical knowledge, according to the agnostics, must limit itself to the study of specific social entities over a specific period, ignoring questions of origins, development or change. Motion and development are mentioned only to be reduced to a process of smooth evolution, devoid of any internal contradictions, fissures or leaps.

Though it is important in study social systems in their relative constancy, this is a methodological gambit, one that should not include turning relative constancy into an absolute or the separation of social systems from chronology, contradiction and transformation. Such separation leads to ambivalence based on an implicit and undeclared ideology positing the eternal nature of social systems.

The adherents of such schools of thought go so far as to claim that the term mankind is devoid of any meaning, and hence has no place within the study of history. Reality comprises, they claim, individual communities and cultural ethnicities. History is nothing but the rise and fall of isolated civilisations that neither interact nor overlap. Any historical process comprises a number of disconnected processes, lacking unity. Accordingly, the qualitative and distinctive characteristics of each civilisation are inflated; differences between civilisations are promoted to the rank of absolute constants, making the clash of civilisations inevitable.

There is a denial of any possibility of a comprehensive history encompassing mankind, any history that incorporates common experiences of technological progress or social conflict. Historical movement, it is claimed, has no pattern. Even the legitimacy of the existence of social movements is questioned, on the grounds that movement is a mechanical concept and consequently inapplicable to society. Any talk about a social reality, even on the level of an individual country, becomes inaccurate. Nobody — other than the sceptics of course — can explain the study of isolated aspects without referring to the totality from which these aspects are isolated.

Once the possibility of any regularities in social and historical movement is denied, it becomes easy to claim that history is incapable of interpreting the past or predicting the future on the basis of an interpretation of the past.

Historiography can thus be limited to a description of distinctive individual events, consciously refusing any generalisation since history is merely an irrational event, devoid of logic. To think in such a way is to insist that the study of history must be concerned, primarily, with unique instances. Historical studies individualise rather than generalise. Such a nihilistic denial of the possibility of a social science that sets itself the task of studying society in history incorporates too a denial of the possibility of any conscious transformation of the present.

Thus it is, Al-Azm argues, that humanity is left prey to circumstances over which it can exercise no control. Denying the possibility of the discipline of theoretical sociology and proclaiming the incompatibility of history and theory reduces history to a chronicle of events and deprives historical studies of the only tool — theoretical generalisation — capable of revealing recurrent, unlimited phenomena.

For Al-Azm any materialism worth the name can predict social events without becoming an oracular philosophy. Just as astronomers can predict an eclipse of the sun on the basis of earlier observation so, Al-Azm argues, economists can forecast changes in an economic cycle.

"In defence of materialism and history" suggests that those who confine in closed systems the study of specific structures or even events compound the errors propagated by those who concentrate on individual events. How, Al-Azm asks, can one take seriously what Foucault says very seriously — that whether the earth is round or flat depends on the age one lives in, and the discourse and problematic dominant in that age. Foucault's attempts to excavate unconscious systems of knowledge and of signs, revealing the correlation between words, ideas and objects within these systems, stops at the level of observation, without seriously considering elements of continuity across periods and systems and without attempting to explain gaps. As a consequence, such gaps could come to be perceived as enigmatic, and beyond interpretation.

Al-Azm believes, like a great many others, that mainstream contemporary philosophy incorporates a strong current of determinism whereby systems and structures dominate humanity, and what is constant dominates what is historical. Contemporary philosophy, Al-Azm argues, has come to defend the status quo, confirming the futility of action and the impotence of man.

Reviewed by Ibrahim Fathi

A piece of the pie

Hagar, issue 3/4, ed. Salwa Bakr and Hoda El-Sadda. Cairo: Dar El-Noussous, 1996

Which thread do you take into woman's world, the one of facts and documentaries or the equally revealing world of imaginative writing? Whichever one you feel more inclined towards is in the latest, combined issue (nos. 3/4) of the Egyptian feminist publication *Hagar*.

The table of contents of this double-barrelled issue is divided into six headings. Free writing includes poetry and prose, both in the original and in translation, meditations on time as well as two book reviews. This section, which occupies the middle part, is flanked by documentaries. The first, entitled "Articles" comprises eleven research papers on just about every aspect of a woman's life. These are the work of the Gender Committee done in preparation for the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The second, entitled "File", deals with two controversial issues: the much contested new marriage contract and the inequities of the present citizenship laws which deny the children of an Egyptian mother and foreign father the right in Egyptian nationality. Since the whole journal is written in Arabic, the editors did well to include an elegantly written English extract.

The anonymous editorial uses as a springboard the dynamic role of the NGOs at the ICPD to call for an even more effective role for these independent organisations. For many people, especially women, such organisations might be the only means of participating in public life — a view borne out by the evidence provided in the research section which follows immediately after.

This next section comprises eleven prismatic studies which scrutinise almost every aspect of women's existence through information gleaned from field studies, statistics and the occasional questionnaire. The studies examine everything from such intimate issues as sexual behaviour, female genital mutilation and reproductive rights to more public issues like female education, political and athletic participation and economic status. Since she is oppressed, repressed and discriminated against in all conceivable social spheres, a woman has either a smaller piece of the pie or no piece at all. Lack of participation, willful or imposed, in such diverse activities as athletics and politics characterise an average Egyptian woman's existence. On the economic level she is denied easy access to bank credit for small businesses which further contributes in what is termed the feminisation of poverty. Quite disturbing is the pattern whereby a woman — especially in her role as mother — contributes to her own disparaging social image. But the most disconcerting fact of all to emerge is that two-thirds of Egyptian women are illiterate. Worthy of note is Khima Martin's "The Muslim Woman: From the Qur'an to Personal Status Law" which looks away from its folds a lucid account of the Egyptian women's liberation movement. Conversely, but equally relevant, are Deniz Kandiyoti's revelations about the involvement of male chauvinism in certain hierarchical systems.

Keeping an eye on the practical side of things, these studies end, wherever necessary, with a set of recommenda-

tions which might ameliorate the deplorable conditions faced by women. The studies are scholarly and informative, and they appear to leave no stone of womanly woes unturned, even that most avoidable of subjects — prostitution. This section of *Hagar*, although mainly factual, is not totally devoid of the literary, as seen in Oumama Abou Bakr's sympathetic reading of the mystic Rabi'a Al-Adawiyya and Amina Rachid's analysis of Annie Ernaux's autobiographical treatment of alienation.

Time, public and private, is the subject of the following section. This discourse on time is crowned by Salwa Bakr's pithy reproach of us Egyptians for having picked up the Prufrock refrain "There will be time, there will be time" and "indeed there will be time".

"Creativity" is the title of the next section, and it is spearheaded by Laila El Sherbini's "1-12 May 1968" which merges the foreground account of student riots in Paris with a similar struggle on the Egyptian front. Nothing exclusively feminine in this vivid and poignantly sensitive narrative, only the timeless, universal struggle for freedom and justice. The work of poets from Algeria — perhaps a tribute to the bonding of Arab sisters — includes an intriguing poem entitled "Vest" which makes the initiative the subject thereof. No less enlightening is the poetry and prose of the increasingly vocal and visible Arab American community. Introduced and competently translated by Mona Ibrahim and Maha Said, these works prove anew that although one may adopt the lingo, customs and even

names of a foreign culture, something in one's consciousness will always clamour for identification with the parent culture. All equally moving, the texts are variations on the theme of Naomi Shabab Nye's "My Father and the Fig Tree".

Four short prose stories by young Egyptian women writers make generous use of archetypes, fairy tales and other cultural and artistic allusions to produce fiction which is boldly unconventional. At one end of the spectrum is Sahar El-Mougi's echo of Naguib Mahfouz's sense of place, at the other is May El-Tilmesani's amusing parody of Noah's ark.

A review of Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* explores the many levels and different dimensions of this much publicised work. Less known than Soueif's novel, but probably more controversial, is Nancy Qualls Corbett's *The Sacred Prostitutes*, the subject of the next review, which probes the mythological roots of this ancient profession.

Edited by Salwa Bakr and Hoda El-Sadda, and with an advisory board that includes academics, lawyers and other public figures, *Hagar's* avant garde spirit makes it one of a kind. It is as likely to raise eyebrows as to draw praise. This particular issue has been long in the making — which probably explains why a couple of articles may seem a bit dated. But the fact remains that it makes for a good read on a train trip from Cairo to Alexandria — and back.

Reviewed by Nazek Fahmi

Plain Talk

I like the way in which the English celebrate the memories of their acclaimed writers. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Animal Farm*, a George Orwell Prize for Political Writing was established. A committee headed by Professor John Keane examined a number of entries, and the winners were announced on 18 March.

The large number of entries refutes predictions of the end of political writing, a tradition which began in the 18th century and includes such figures as Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Edmund Burke, Tom Paine and others.

Now some people believe that political literacy is coming to an end and, as Gore Vidal puts it, that "the written word that was at the core of the education system since the 15th century BC is now being replaced by sounds and images electronically transmitted".

George Orwell can be rightly regarded as the extension of Swift and Defoe. Half a century after the publication of *Animal Farm*, it still is a best-seller. A new edition has just been published by Secker, the first publisher of the novel. According to the *Sunday Times* the book was translated and published in six countries and annual sales by Penguin alone are 120,000 copies a year.

Animal Farm, like *Gulliver's Travels* will, no doubt, survive as a tale for both adults and children. The book was described as "a trenchant, pointed satire upon one particular state, then a sacred cow among left-wing intellectuals: Stalin's Russia". Undoubtedly in the atmosphere in which Orwell was writing, it was not easy for him to find a publisher. In the immediate aftermath of W.W.I, Russia was Britain's ally; I still remember how, on my first arrival in England at that time, I was always met with pictures of "Uncle Joe" Stalin. One publisher after another turned down *Animal Farm*, until August 1945 when it was published by Secker. This rejection by publishers is reminiscent of Naguib Mahfouz's loss of a publisher for his novel *Awlad Harouna* (*The Children of Gebelawi*).

Animal Farm, an allegory, was labelled by Orwell himself as a fairy tale. Of the novel, E. S. Eliot, then the director of Faber and Faber said: "It is a distinguished piece of writing... the fable is very skillfully handled and... the narrative keeps one's interest on its own plane — and that is something very few authors have achieved since Gulliver: the question is whether this is the right point of view from which to criticise the political situation at the present time".

Needless to say, *Animal Farm* was banned in the Soviet Union. Following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, says Peter Millar in the *Sunday Times*, it was translated into Pashto with "a cover depicting a medal-bedecked pig with bloody ears' paws wearing a Russian helmet". Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the book has been translated into Ukrainian, Russian, Polish and other Slavic languages.

To the question about the death of political writing professor John Keane answers: "The greatest reason why the art of political writing is not in decline is the simple fact that trustworthy politicians are as plentiful as honest burglars. The 18th century insight that corruption, sleaze and invisible power are, normally better organized than citizens' freedom remains true, and so long as it does, the act of publicly stirring up trouble through political writing will endure, even flourish".

Mursi Saad El-Din

Pioneering programmes

Art, poetry and bombs. Mahmoud El-Wardani selects the more interesting titles to have appeared in the past month

■ *Masr El-Mahaba Wal-Salam Baya El-Mashaya Wal-Islam* (The Egypt of Love and Peace between Christianity and Islam), vol. I, Hussein Kafafy. Cairo: Dar El-Mahroussa, 1996

Hussein Kafafy's point of departure in this book is that Egypt is a homeland that embraces both Christians and Muslims, hence his focus on the struggle of Copts as part of the history of Egyptian resistance in conquerors and colonialists.

This, the first volume, traces back the beginnings of Christianity in the country in the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. The author paints a vivid picture of the subsequent torture and martyrdom of Egyptians who embraced Christianity, and the beginning of monasticism with the desert fathers. He then moves on to the torture of Copts during Byzantine rule. The first volume charts the history of Copts until the advent of Arab rule.

■ *Fi El-Shi'r El-Jahili* (On Pre-Islamic Poetry), Taha Hussein, intr. Abdel-Moneim Talima. Cairo: Dar El-Nahr, 1996

Taha Hussein's banned *Fi El-Shi'r El-Jahili*, first published in 1926, has recently been reprinted. On first publication, the book elicited such indignation that the author was taken to court and suspended from his university post. This is the first time since the 1920s that the work has been available in book form. (*El-Qahira* monthly journal reprinted it last year). The book departs from received canonical ideas about *jahili*, or pre-Islamic, poet-

ry. Taha Hussein adopts a Cartesian methodology, upholding a critical stance towards all pre-conceptions and certainties about the subject. Through rigorous analysis of pre-Islamic poetry, the author reaches the conclusion that most of it is apocryphal, and written after the advent of Islam, for political reasons.

■ *Layla Maghouna* (A Mad Night), Mourid Barghouti. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1996

While most of Mourid Barghouti's 10 previous collections of poetry were published in Beirut and Amman (save for one that was reprinted in Egypt), the collection in hand is the first to be published here. It brings together poems written over the last two years.

■ *Mandela Wa Gansub Affila Bayn El-Madi Wal-Hader* (Mandela and South Africa between the Past and the Present), Walid Mahmud Abdel-Nasser. Cairo: Dar El-Mustaqbal El-Arabi, 1996

In this volume Walid Abdel-Nasser examines the recent history of South Africa up to Nelson Mandela's election as president, the end of apartheid and the first democratic multi-ethnic experiment in the country. The narrative outlines the complex ethnic, sociological and economic elements that

have informed South Africa's recent history.

■ *Nisous Magadassa Wa Nisous Donlatiya Min Masr El-Qadima* (Sacred and Secular Texts from Ancient Egypt), two vols., tr. Maher Gomayati, rev. Taha Abdel-Hakim. Cairo: Dar El-Fikr. Li-Darassat Wal-Nashr, in cooperation with UNESCO Publications, 1996

The first of these two hefty tomes is devoted to texts by kings, nobles, plebeians and the Book of the Dead. The second vol-

umes deals with magic and dreams in addition to love poems figure in the second volume.

■ *Ruwaad El-Fann Wa Tallat El-Tawneer Fi Masr* (The Pioneers of Art and the Vanguard of Enlightenment in Egypt), Mukhtar El-Attar. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation in cooperation with the Egyptian Association for the Critics of the Plastic Arts, 1996

The first chapter of doyen critic Mukhtar

from the second generation as El-Hussein Fawzi and Abdel-Salam El-Sherif. In the third chapter, El-Attar tackles territory more familiar to the general reader — namely, the pioneering works of Mahmoud Mukhtar, Mohamed Naguib, Youssef Kamel, Raghib Ayyad, Ahmed Sabri and Mahmoud Said. The concluding chapter is on those artists — 13 in number — whom the author considers "the vanguard of enlightenment". Foremost among these are Abdel-Hadi El-Gazzar, Hamed Nada, Inji Aflaton and Sabri Ragheb. It is heartening to note that in the preface El-Attar scrupulously points out that while some names the reader might expect to come across are absent from the text, this is primarily a matter of coincidence.

■ *El-Amaal El-Kamil Li-Naguib Sorour* (The Complete Works of Naguib Sorour), vol. III, Naguib Sorour. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1996

This, the third volume of the complete works of poet and playwright Naguib Sorour (1932-1978) brings together three of his most important poetry collections. The first of these, *El-Tagrida El-Insaniya* (The Human Tagrid), contains the poems written between 1952 and 1959, first published in 1967. The second collection reproduced here is *Lozum Ma Yazalam* (The Necessity of

What is Necessary) — the poems written in the sixties during his exile in Budapest and first published in 1975. The third, *Protocollat Hakamaa Riche* (The Protocols of the Elders of Riche (Cafe)), contains the poems written in the period just before Sorour's death.

■ *El-Bernamig El-Nawawi El-Isra'ili Wal-Ann El-Qawmi El-Arabi* (The Israeli Nuclear Programme and National Arab Security), Mamdouh Hamed Attia. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1996

In its annual report of July 1995 the Swedish Institute for Peace Studies recorded that, with the exception of Israel and India, the production of plutonium for military purposes had virtually ceased. From the report it became clear that Israel was still working on its nuclear programme despite protestations of peaceful intent.

The author, retired army chief-of-staff, is an expert on the subject to which he has devoted this book. Here, he deals with every facet of the issue: the establishment of Israel's nuclear programme and its development, the presence of all the necessary ingredients such as the Israeli nuclear energy establishment, universities, and research institutes. The author also deals at length with Israeli nuclear weapons, the way they operate and the hierarchy that controls them. The book examines the threats posed to Arab security by Israeli nuclear weapons and possible scenarios for confronting it.



Taha Hussein and Naguib Sorour



Women's voices, Women's words

Learning the basic ABCs is still a luxury which many women cannot afford. **Mariz Tadros** attends classes at a new gender-sensitive literacy project and speaks to the women involved

"I want to learn to read and write so that I don't live all my life with a complex — a feeling that I'm less of a human being. My father made me go to school so that I'd learn how to write my name and read a few words. I was taken out of school when I was young. Now I work as a seamstress."

"When my husband wanted to divorce me, he gave me a piece of paper to sign. I could not read it and I was barely able to sign my name. He told me that the paper said that the car which he has been using as a taxi and which was bought with my money, my life savings, belongs to me. It was only a couple of months later when I received my divorce papers, that I realised that the paper I signed was a declaration [stating] that I have been given all my rights under the law, that I received in full my alimony, my gold, all my possessions and that I have given him ownership of the car," recounted Mastoula to *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Mastoula, who asked that her family name be withheld, is a middle-aged seamstress from Matariya, a working class suburb in eastern Cairo. Mastoula has been attending literacy classes for about a year.

It is cases like Mastoula's which cry out for a better understanding of the needs of women who are too old, too marginalised or too poor to seek primary education, but who nevertheless constitute a significant portion of the population.

Adult female literacy was the impetus behind a tripartite gender literacy project grouping the government's Agency for the Eradication of Illiteracy and Adult Education, UNICEF and CARITAS, a non-governmental organisation (NGO). The government agency provided the salaries of the tutors as well as the books. UNICEF offered some funding and help in the organisation of the project while CARITAS provided teacher training. The programme has been implemented in five governorates: Assiut, Qena, Sohag and in very poor urban pockets in Alexandria and Cairo.

Salah Abdel-Ati Ahmed, director of the Agency for the Eradication of Illiteracy and Adult Education, told the *Weekly* that the wide gap between males and females in terms of the prevalence of illiteracy has obliged the government to recognise women as a priority group. Ahmed argued that with the breakdown of social barriers against female education, even in the most conservative rural milieu, there has been an increase in women's literacy opportunities.

Ahmed refused to see poverty as a precipitator of increased illiteracy amongst women: "Poverty is the hanger on which we hang all our shortcomings. A poor factory worker complaining that he can't afford to pay school fees for his children would have been able to do so if he didn't pay a daily LE4 for a pack of cigarettes."

The agency has introduced drastic changes in the literacy programme curriculum during the past six months to make it more gender sensitive, according to Ahmed. The new curriculum is being used on an experimental basis in 16 governorates. The stereotypical image of women in their domestic setting has been modified; women's participation in politics was highlighted along with marriage and rental contract procedures. The duration of the programme was reduced from 18 to nine months.

Initially it was meant for those over the age of 15, according to Ahmed, but UNICEF has been pressing for the inclusion of those above the age of 12 who are no longer eligible for primary school ed-

ucation. "It's problematic because they are out quite old enough for the illiteracy programme and yet the Ministry of Education is not responsible for educating them because they are too old," Ahmed explained.

According to Malak Zalook, UNICEF's educational programmer, the programme's aim is to provide basic literacy rather than a high level of education. Malak warned that women may revert to illiteracy because once the programme is finished, they have no means of practicing their newly acquired skills. She said that a post-literacy programme is being considered by UNICEF to provide some "cushioning for someone who wishes to continue", especially for those who may wish to get a preparatory and secondary school education. Zalook said it was unfortunate that UNICEF does not offer any scholarships for girls and women who are too poor to continue higher education, but added: "We have not had a situation where a young woman wanted to go on to preparatory school."

Salah Sebah, technical supervisor for the CARITAS literacy project thinks differently. Sebah told the *Weekly* that the head of Mercoz, a German NGO, who was visiting a women's literacy class in a rural village in Egypt, asked the students if they wanted to continue learning. They answered "yes we do". "It is a real dilemma to think that women who want to get an education can't," Sebah said with a sigh. He said once females want to get beyond the basic level of education, all kinds of obstacles emerge, especially if they are over the primary school age or if they come from an impoverished background and have few learning skills.

"For a female in a rural area, for example, it makes a big difference if the female is married or not. If she is not married and she is over the age of fourteen, she may be forced to retreat from public life, whether from agriculture or even mingling with people in society," Sebah explained. He also conceded that while parents may allow her to acquire basic education (providing it is not in a co-ed setting), the pursuit of higher education may be more difficult for them to approve.

Sebah indicated that the standard of the family plays a fundamental role. "We discovered that those girls who have been able to continue were those of a slightly better-off class, for instance, those girls able to reach second year preparatory." UNICEF, CARITAS and the government Agency for the Eradication of Illiteracy and Adult Education agree that there is a vast difference in providing female education for academic as opposed to practical reasons.

"To respond to this demand (higher education), you need specialised teachers for the different subjects, teachers for the different levels, curriculums for intermediate level," Sebah said. The list was long and the conclusion definite: "it is not realistically possible."

Sebah argued, however, that even basic education such as that provided by CARITAS paves the way for female empowerment. For example it gives women an excuse to get out of the house and mix with other women. "Once they are educated, they feel they can have a greater role in the decision-making process of the household," said Sebah.

Even if literacy does not fling open the doors to female emancipation, it may at the very least provide a barrier against the kind of deception to which Mastoula was subjected. Mastoula is one of 20



Where better than sailing on the Nile could one enjoy the fresh spring breeze photo: Sherif Sornbol of Sham El-Nessim? ... But maybe too many have had the same thought

women now attending a two-hour, thrice-weekly all-female literacy class offered by CARITAS in the Cairo suburb of Matariya. CARITAS runs its own gender literacy courses parallel to the gender programmes it provides in association with the government agency and UNICEF. The format and duration of the courses are almost identical, although CARITAS follows its own curriculum which is recognised by the government Agency for the Eradication of Illiteracy and Adult Education.

It is mid-day and at Mastoula's beginners' class, the women are learning two new letters in the alphabet and are engaged in a lively class discussion. Some swore they would never attend class if it were co-ed. Others such as Mervat and Hend, who are not yet married, said they wouldn't feel comfortable, especially if the teacher was a male. Zeinab, more commonly known as *Umm Tamer*, said that she wanted to read and write "for my children. My son is now in primary school, every time he needs help with his homework, he runs to his father, who sometimes comes late from work. I wanted to be able to help him, to feel that I am not useless and to show him I am not ignorant. I also wanted to be able to read addresses, to read the signs on the shops, to know the numbers of the buses."

Shouvikar, a middle-aged housewife like Zeinab, also got sick of feeling left behind when her children entered primary school, especially since her husband is illiterate. "Year after year when I was young, I wanted to read and write but never got the opportunity. Then when I got married and had my son, who is now in fifth grade primary, I felt crippled. I couldn't help him with anything. So when my young daughter reached first year primary school, I decided, 'that's it, I must do something about it, I can't stay like this any longer', so I came here to read and write," she said.

Umm Aber, 56, is the oldest woman in the class. Originally from Sohag in southern Egypt, her father was a supervisor at the Ministry of Education. "When we were young, we had three classes only: two for boys and one for girls, but we didn't really learn anything. I came out knowing no more than when I got in. My brothers got private lessons so that they could continue their education while I was barely taught how to write. My husband is a bus driver and he works long hours. I wanted to be able

to use the buses to visit my married daughter who lives on the other side of town. I needed to learn to read bus numbers and signs and street signs, otherwise it would be difficult for me to get there on my own," she said.

Howeida, 27, however, joined the class because she wanted to be able to read novels and magazines and feel that she is an educated person. She was reluctant to join for many years "because the first time I joined school when I was six years old, I hated it. The teacher didn't like me and she used to beat me. So I vowed I'd never go back to school. Now I feel it is a necessity, one of the requirements of my work is to have basic reading and writing skills. I want to get a certificate to say that I am literate. It is a weapon for the future."

Mervat, 20, is learning to read and write behind her father's back. She is afraid to tell him she is attending literacy classes. He wouldn't approve because "I was given my chance when I was young. My father encouraged me to get an education but I failed preparatory school two years in a row, so I was taken out. My mother knows that I come here but I can't tell my father."

Moua Fouad, their teacher, has been involved in female literacy for the last seven years and is a stout advocate of women's empowerment through greater awareness. She also believes in women's abilities to resist and adapt to male oppression to suit her own needs and interests. This she believes can be learnt through greater exposure to the outer world, one channel of which is literacy.

Fouad said: "In class, they are given an opportunity to talk about the issues that affect them as women, about marriage, about their homes, their children as well as issues such as female genital mutilation [FGM]. We also brought a medical specialist here to class to talk about the side effects of FGM." Fouad said that the husbands of the women in her class have been very cooperative and supportive towards their wives' efforts to read and write. But she added that it is not always this way: "In another group, one jealous husband prohibited his wife, *Umm Hadeya*, from attending classes because she would neglect her household duties. But *Umm Hadeya* was determined to come, so she used to wake up at 5am to finish all her housework so that her husband wouldn't be able to grumble when it's time for class."



Up the coconut tree

Shahira is an elderly woman, or rather, this is how her friends describe her. When her husband died she felt more like a child whose parents had just abandoned her. She constantly needed advice but found precious little around. She felt that people shunned her, that she was an embarrassment. For a while she withdrew, trying to sort out her life.

In time — and it took a lot of it — the painful process bore fruit and she eventually emerged stronger, with a clear knowledge of what she wanted. She no longer felt too old or childlike, just full of energy for the task ahead.

This is when attitudes changed around her. Those who had avoided her when she needed them were now coming forward. They were suddenly extending more advice than any agony column could have ever produced. She is happy now? Well, they have no intention of letting her back in the feeling.

Shahira's youngest daughter still lives at home and they both enjoy the frictions, little upsets soon forgotten except by the well-meaning friends and relations who will not allow a hiccup to pass. They would not miss such a golden opportunity for the world. Shahira will have to listen to them. She will not be able to make it without their help, they tell each other on the telephone.

You are not to treat your daughter like a friend, they advise her sternly. "You have to show her who the boss is." Shahira does not feel like a boss. "Treat her like an equal," others tell her. "Don't let her think you are a doddering old woman." Shahira does not consider her daughter as her equal in years, but neither does she think of herself as a doddering old woman. She believes that she is just an individual and would like to be treated as such. She refuses to be put in a niche, categorized by age, weight and/or anything else. She may be over fifty and slightly on the plump side but that does not make her a fat old woman, she protests indignantly.

Sometimes Shahira goes out with her daughter to a restaurant and a movie. "You shouldn't," say the friends and relations; "You should stick to people your own age, leave the young alone; they hate the old." But she enjoys young people in her work she meets many, and she has come to appreciate their points of view. She finds them open to new ideas and generally fair in their judgements. Her generation, on the other hand, seems solidified around beliefs and attitudes which were fashionable forty years ago, closed off to change, bemoaning the years gone by.

Others simply won't accept that they are no longer teenagers and, with the help of surgery and miracle diets and pills, live in the collective illusion of eternal youth, dismissing their offspring as mere children even when they are pushing forty.

Shahira feels that her life — or whatever is left of it — is too precious to waste on regrets or make-believe: Where does that leave her? "I am no longer afraid to be alone," she says. "I have my job, my books, TV, a nice house, I have plenty to occupy my time, if they would only leave me alone!" But they won't. "You are going to be depressed, we know, you just pretend to like being alone. Go out, make friends, play bridge, play golf, travel, don't coddle what you are enjoying, it is bound to be bad for you."

Shahira is now asking herself questions again, the same questions she asked when her husband died: Is she in her daughter's way, crowding her, cramping her style? "Of course, you are not," says the daughter. "Of course you are," say the friends and relations. "We know better, if you don't listen to us you will be sorry. Haven't we always given you good advice?" Shahira cannot remember when, or if at all they ever gave her good advice; but they have planted a seed of doubt in her mind and it is growing.

She discovers that she is constantly checking herself these days. She no longer wants to go out for meals with her daughter and declines invitations extended by anyone a day under sixty. She doesn't accept those either because she has no need to be told how wrong she has been and what it was she should have done instead. She feels that she is either neglecting her daughter or breathing down her neck. Sometimes she is told that she is doing both at the same time. She very often wonders about what is really expected of her, and how can she please everybody.

Shahira remembers reading that in certain parts of the world older people climb up a coconut tree; then the tree is shaken. Those who don't fall are reinstated in the community until the next time. She wonders if some of the lucky ones who were able to hang on simply refuse to come down after the test, and decide to stay where they are, observing the goings-on below, comfortably seated on their perch. She assumes that at least there, they would not be plagued with good advice. Shahira reflects that coconut is delicious and that she, personally, would not mind the diet.

Fayza Hassan

Supra Dayma

Oriental chicken

Ingredients:
One chicken
200 grammes minced meat
2 cups rice (washed and soaked)
2 cups chicken stock or 1 bouillon cube
one onion (finely chopped)
4 or 5 slices of each: celery heads, leek heads, garlic, carrots, onions
250 grammes of an assortment of: skinned almonds + pine nuts + pistachios
60 grammes butter
1 tbsp. butter ghee
2 tbsp. corn oil
2 tbsp. white flour
Salt + pepper + allspice + cinnamon

Method:
Wash the chicken and season it with salt and pepper. Fold the legs by means of a thread, then smear it with the butter ghee and place it in a preheated oven. Ten minutes later put the assorted vegetables in the chicken pan and leave uncovered until it browns well. In the meantime, fry the chopped onion in the butter until golden, then add the minced meat and stir-fry it over high heat until its water is drained. Add the rice, stir it in, then add either the stock or 2 cups of water plus the bouillon cube. Add the spices and bring it to boil, then lower the heat and simmer until the rice cooks with the meat. Remove the chicken from the oven after it browns, cut it in quarters, then on top of the cooker, fry the flour in the chicken and vegetable residue until it browns, then add some water, stir them all well to blend, mashing them with a fork whilst stirring them. Strain them to acquire a light brown gravy and set aside in a sauce bowl. Fry the nuts in the oil until golden. Pour the rice and the minced meat in a serving dish and place the chicken quarters on top of it. Then scatter the fried nuts at random to top it all. Serve the sauce aside with this dish (optional) together with a rich green salad and a *hommus* salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Within hobbling distance

Nigel Ryan discovers more than stodge

I have walked down Mahmoud Bassiouni Street a great many times and though I did not fail to notice Le Pacha, a small restaurant with a yellow glass fronted facade — not to be confused with its floating, Zamelek moored namesake — it was a long time before I ventured in. Quite why I was so reluctant is a mystery. It is, more or less, my local. I live just a block away. It is small, which is neither good nor bad. Whenever I caught glimpses of the interior through the opening or closing door it looked inviting enough. Yet still I did not cross the threshold. Not that is, until now.

It was Easter and having sprained my ankle I needed somewhere close enough to be a painless hobble. So in I hobbled, to the local I had not visited before. Beyond the yellow glass window on the street lie just six wooden tables with tiled tops. Above each of the six tables are capiz shell lamps. And at the back of the restaurant is a long table on which are placed those spirit-lit serving trays that are generally reserved for catered functions. There is a small spiral staircase to what I assume are the kitchens. From one of the steps hung a small blackboard on which were chalked the day's specials — white bean stew, stuffed cabbage leaves, and grilled veal. We were the only two customers.

There is no menu beyond the blackboard and so the waiter obligingly opened up the serving trays at the

back. But today's specials turned out to be yesterday's specials and today being Easter there were no specials. The blackboard was promptly wiped clean and we were left with very little choice.

There was spinach in a tomato sauce, rice and macaroni béchamel. Now this is all very standard fare — it can be fine if prepared with a little care or it can be ghastly. Usually it is the latter, unless you are eating in someone's home. But on this occasion the food was better than one could have hoped. Care had been taken. The spinach was fresh and the sauce tasted of tomatoes and not tomato puree. If you do not like garlic you would have problems with the dish but I like garlic and consequently had none. The macaroni ordered by my lunch date restored one's faith in that much maligned dish. Rather than the usual starch laden stodge atop shrivelled pasta — less all dentate than re-dedicated — the béchamel tasted of dairy products and was flavoured with outmeat. It had been properly made.

These are little things. The sad thing is that they caused such surprise. Certainly I shall return, on either high day or low holiday, when the day's specials are being served. As it was, I hobbled out just LE19 poorer. Two people had had a perfectly adequate lunch, and I had discovered my local.

Le Pacha, 17 Mahmoud Bassiouni St., Downtown, Tel: 574 6390

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

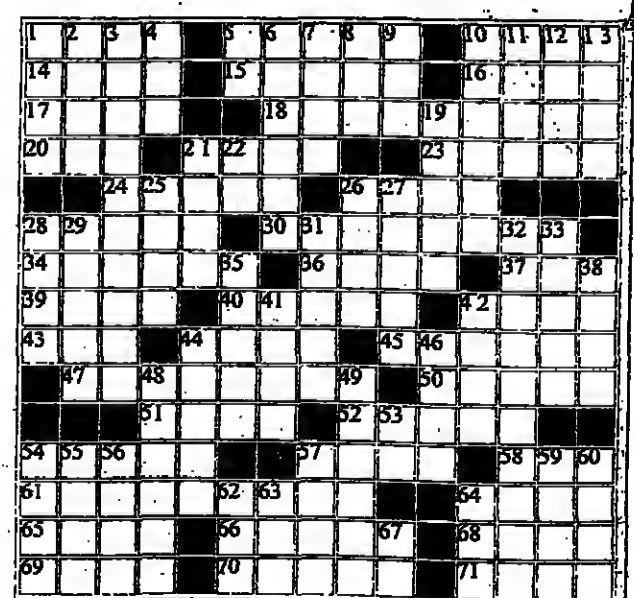
ACROSS

- Culm (4)
- Brilliance (5)
- Fahd, Assad or Arafat (4)
- Shoestring (4)
- Examine with hands (5)
- Texas city (4)
- Long appendage of nerve cell (4)
- Aversion (9)
- Nail (4)
- Prefix meaning "be side" (4)
- Mounts (5)
- Passes over (5)
- Landed (4)
- Evil spirit, fiend (5)
- Carves in relief (8)
- Uriage, they are green and when ripe, they are black (5)
- Double sulfate of aluminium and potassium (4)
- Pinch (3)
- Velocity (4)

DOWN

- Smack (4)
- Cab (4)
- Money-saving (10)
- Humanity (3)
- Oscar awarded film of the 80s (2)
- Unrefined (6)
- Moth with crescent-shaped spots on its wings (4)
- Perform (3)
- Temperature-humidity-in dex, abbr. (3)
- Experts (6)
- Deserters, strike breakers

- Main (5)
- Uncontaminated (4)
- Greek letter (3)
- Algerian port (4)
- Keen penetration (6)
- Raises (8)
- Portents (5)
- Violations (5)
- British composer (5)
- Jewellin (5)
- Bless (4)
- Moke (3)
- Act cautiously (9)
- Roofed colomnade (4)
- Polygonal recess (4)
- The Ram (5)
- Inferno (4)
- Sunbathes (4)
- Castrates (5)
- Revise (4)



- Hurt (4)
- Young men (4)
- Spectrum (5)
- Languish for (4)
- Symbol for "astatine" (2)
- Change position (4)
- Competent (4)
- Flesh-brush (5)
- Narcotic (4)
- Make happy (5)
- Nicknamed "Pine Tree State" (5)
- Counted (10)
- Enchantress (5)
- Morse; east aside (5)
- Personal pronoun (3)
- Writing implements (4)
- Detest (4)
- Large African feline (4)
- Genetic organ (4)
- Gear teeth (4)
- Efficacy (6)
- Installed; sat (6)
- Musical note (2)
- Salvated (4)
- Weather directions (4)
- Inflamed suppurating swelling (4)
- Unaccompanied musical pieces (4)
- Sodium chloride (4)
- Exhaust (3)
- Scandinavian coin (3)
- Personal pronoun (3)
- Nazi special police force, abbr. (2)

4430150

Children denied citizenship through their Egyptian mothers found little solace in a new child law. Dina Ezzat examines their plight

Citizens of the mother land

Egypt's nationality law is criticised as discriminatory, but for thousands of women and children, there is much more than principle at stake

"I met Pierre when I was doing my Ph.D. in Paris. He was studying Arabic and learning about Islam," recalled Mariam (not her real name). "When he converted, we got married and came to live in Egypt because we thought it would be the right place to bring up our children in accordance with our conservative values."

"Now that my son and daughter are getting older," Mariam goes on, "I believe we made the right decision by raising them in Cairo. But, most of all, I wish that in the same way that they are as French as their father, they could be as Egyptian as their mother."

Mariam is one of an estimated 250,000 Egyptian women married to non-Egyptians. Under Article 2 of Egypt's Nationality Law, these women cannot pass on their citizenship to their children — that right being reserved to Egyptian men who marry foreign women.

"This (law) is a blatant violation of the constitution which specifically stipulates full and unequivocal equality for all Egyptian citizens, regardless of their sex," asserted Farida El-Nagashi, secretary-general of the Women's Progressive Union.

Under the current Egyptian nationality law, children are entitled to citizenship if they are born to Egyptian parents or an Egyptian father. Children born of an Egyptian mother are granted an Egyptian passport if their father's identity is unknown, or if they were abandoned.

Blatant or not, Article 2 of the Nationality Law makes a clear distinction between the rights of men and women. And, the issue is not just one of nationality, but one of basic economics: There is no accurate figure for the number of children born to Egyptian mothers and foreign fathers, however; the government, which is constantly voicing complaints about the high cost of subsidising education and health services for a population of 60 million people, is not really willing to foot the bill for, say, another million children.



Victims of nationality law: a harsh life and a grim future

Government officials also claim that if the one million children in question were granted citizenship, they would be eligible to enter the sensitive zones of the armed forces and the diplomatic corps — two areas where their loyalty to their country must be certain. Sociologists argue that it is mothers rather than fathers who teach children about loyalty.

"None of these arguments are convincing," said Foad Riyad, professor of law at Cairo University. "The purpose of nationality laws is not to act as family planning schemes, but to provide due legitimacy and services to all citizens," Riyad asserted in a research paper on the issue.

Over the past few decades, political circumstances have given rise to mixed marriages. The influx of Palestinians to Egypt after the Israeli occupation of their land in the late 1940s, the short-lived union between Egypt and Syria in the late 1950s and the integration protocols with Sudan in the early 1970s have all opened the door to these marriages.

Rasha was born in Kuwait to an Egyptian mother and a Palestinian-Jordanian father. She came to Egypt in 1984 and feels herself emotionally attached to the country. "I feel very close to Egyptian culture," she said, "but I'm angry with my parents for putting me in this impossible situation. I recent having to pay my university fees in US dollars when I feel as Egyptian as someone born here."

Alienation is just one problem which children and youth like Rasha have to deal with. Insecurity and a turbulent family life are other major grievances. "The worst thing my family faces in this situation is that my father has to live abroad since his job prospects in Egypt are virtually non-existent," complained Rasha. "He is obliged to be separated from his family and work in the Gulf. As a result, our family is not as close-knit as it should be. His insecure position as a foreigner in Egypt has a lot to do with this situation."

Disc as Rasha and Mariam's children's situation may

be, they do, however, hold a passport. Others are not so lucky. Mirenda, the daughter of an Egyptian woman and a German father, has no passport because she has no nationality. Her parents, both professors, met at Ain Shams University, got married and have been living here for two decades. "By Egyptian law, I am not entitled to Egyptian citizenship. And, under German law, I am not entitled to German citizenship," she said.

So, what is the solution? Women's and child rights activists agree that the problem can only be solved by a new law. But while a campaign to amend the existing law, or draft a new one has been under way for years, the activists' efforts have fallen on deaf official ears.

Over the last year, as the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood (NCMC) began drafting a unified child law, efforts were stepped up to incorporate, within this new code, an article addressing the right of the child to his mother's nationality. The recently-passed legislation failed to tackle the issue, however.

"We tried hard to incorporate an article into this law that would deal with this situation, but we failed," said Amina El-Ghundi, secretary-general of NCMC, a main sponsor of the draft law. "We were told the issue falls under the purview of the nationality law and has to be dealt with within the context of that law."

"The new (child) law gave mothers some marginal rights by increasing the duration of the paid maternity leave to three months... but it ignored the basic right that should be afforded to every Egyptian mother: namely to pass on her nationality to her children," wrote Mustafa Kamel Murad, the leader of the opposition Liberal Party, on the front page of *Al-Ahram*, the party's mouthpiece. Other opposition political parties voice the same concern.

According to novelist Salwa Bakr, "The nationality law is not being viewed in its larger context, namely an entire set of social mores that reduce women to the status of second-class citizens." Bakr is herself a victim of

these social mores, and their legal expression. Married to an Algerian, she cannot pass on her Egyptian nationality to her children, although the family resides in Egypt. The current law, maintains Bakr, "goes against the constitution and *Shari'a* (Islamic law), both of which condemn such discriminatory measures."

A campaign has been launched by the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) to grant Egyptian women the right to automatically pass on their citizenship to their children by foreign husbands.

Earlier this month the EOHR kicked off this campaign by organising a workshop that called for a revision of law 26, issued in 1975, that denies female citizens the rights afforded to their male counterparts in terms of passing on to their children the Egyptian nationality.

The workshop was attended by over 20 specialists, experts and individuals concerned with women's issues and human rights.

Participants agreed to the establishment of a committee that will review the law with the purpose of finding a way to amend the articles that deprive children by Egyptian mothers and non-Egyptian fathers the right to the Egyptian nationality.

The full support of civil society, stressed the participants, is imperative in combating this growing problem. Accordingly, all concerned national and international non-governmental organisations must work together for this cause, they said.

Launched under the title "Equality now", the campaign is planned to continue for one year.

In order to change this law, proposed amendments need to be submitted to the People's Assembly, explained Fawzia Abdel-Sattar, professor of law at Cairo University. Former chairperson of the Parliament's legislative committee, Abdel-Sattar believes that since the issue is not on the government's agenda of priorities, it is unlikely that the much-needed changes will take place anytime soon.

Out of Baghdad

A VICTIM of a biased nationality law and harsh political realities, Bothaina Abdel-Fattah was forcibly separated from her Iraqi husband and her eldest son. Today, she is leading a hard life with five children in one of Cairo's poorest neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, her Iraqi husband is leading a life of misery in his hometown, Basra.

This 48-year-old woman's plight is the result of a combination of lack of awareness and bad luck. "I never thought that one day I would be going through such a rough time. Never," she said.

In 1973, Bothaina went to Iraq with the hope of improving her standard of living. "Working as household help for an Iraqi family, I earned what was considered decent money in those days," she recalled. Having dropped out of school in the fourth grade, cleaning houses seemed to be the only employment for which she was qualified.

Before the year ended, Bothaina married an Iraqi man, Samir Shawkat. "He was very very nice and had a small house in Basra where we lived. Not once was he mean to me. I never felt estranged in Iraq. With him I was very happy and very well treated."

Bothaina and Samir's joyous union was crowned with the birth of three boys and three girls. The eldest was a boy, born in 1974, and the youngest was a girl born in 1989.

During these years, Bothaina maintained close contact with her parents and sister. She also had an apartment built for her in Cairo. "My husband and I always knew that we wanted a base in Egypt."

But the couple's happy marriage came to a tragic end. "The nightmare started with the Iran-Iraq war," Iraq's economic situation grew progressively worse and the family began to suffer. Throughout the war, Bothaina, Samir and their children lived off their meagre savings, ate food that had already expired, and coped with illness without medication. "Mariam [her youngest] had serious lung problems. We had to come to Egypt for her sake," explained Bothaina.

In 1993, Bothaina came to Egypt with her three girls. But their stay was short when Bothaina realised her children are considered Iraqi nationals and therefore are not entitled to subsidised health-care.

In 1994, Bothaina returned to Basra to join the rest of the family. "But things were unbearable. Really impossible. My husband had developed heart problems and rheumatism. He could not work and life was harsh." Bothaina and Samir decided that it was best for the mother and five of the children to go to Egypt.

"We thought no matter what, at least I have family there. We had hoped that the entire family could go. But unfortunately, the Egyptian Embassy in Baghdad told us that my husband and my eldest son could not enter Egypt because they were Iraqi men over the age of 21." Since Cairo and Baghdad have not normalised relations, adult Iraqi men are prohibited from entering Egypt.

Back in Cairo, Bothaina's life turned from miserable to tragic. The apartment she had built while she was away was unlawfully confiscated by her own mother. Her children could not attend Egyptian public schools because they were not Egyptian citizens. "I really do not understand the current nationality law. I need medication for my daughter and I want to send my children to school instead of having them work at workshops for very little money. I am Egyptian and therefore my children should be Egyptians," said the defeated mother.

Bothaina's tragedy took a more dramatic turn last August when her eldest son died in a car accident in Iraq and she was unable to attend the funeral. "I did not have the money to make the trip, and if I went back with my children I would never have been able to bring them back with me. It is more difficult now than before."

Limited options

Some women find out too late that in legal terms the word "foreign" also means non-Egyptian Arab

For 20-year-old Madiba, marriage to a wealthy 70-year-old Arab from one of the oil-rich Gulf states was by no means the stuff of which fairy tales are made. In fact, all she got out of the marriage was a little money, what parents often call a "learning experience" and a child who is deprived of Egyptian citizenship, having been born to a foreign father.

Cynics or fatalists may argue that Madiba got what she deserved, entering into this most holy of institutions for the most unholiest reason — money. But when money is tight and opportunities even tighter, thousands of other poor Egyptian women like Madiba find themselves doing the same thing, and coming out of it in the same situation, or worse. In Madiba's case, once her husband tired of her company, he divorced her, had her and nine-month-old Mamdouh deported from the Gulf country they lived in — leaving her to fend for herself and the child with little money and bleak prospects for the future.

Despite horror stories like Madiba's, however, the incidence of marriages between Egyptian women and wealthy non-Egyptian Arab men has increased over the past few years — as have the socio-economic problems resulting from these marriages. At the forefront of these problems is the issue of raising children, who, under Egyptian law, are denied citizenship and consequently the social, educational and health services and employment within the public sector.

Mamdouh, Madiba's son, is just one case in point. These disadvantages do not stop with Mamdouh. Should he choose to marry an Egyptian woman, his children will also be denied citizenship and the benefits that go hand-in-hand with it.

For women like Madiba, primarily uneducated, under-privileged citizens, these ramifications are too far removed from their day-to-day lives to be taken into serious consideration before entering into marriage with a foreigner. They are driven into wedlock by primarily economic motivations and subsequently pay the cost both in economic and social terms.

"The original text of this law goes back to the early decades of this century, when hardly any Egyptian women would marry a foreign man — even one from another Arab country," explained Fathi Naguib, senior consultant to the Ministry of Justice. "Therefore, this was not a situation that the legislators had to address."

But times have changed, pushing under-privileged young women into marriage for money as a quick solution to their families' financial predicaments.

"These are not marriages in the traditional or real sense of the word," said Maha Atiya, a member of a task force which aims at combating legal illiteracy among women living in poor conditions. "We are talking about older men who come to spend their summer holidays in Egypt. Most of them are married to at least one woman already,

but would still like to have a young wife for their stay."

The vast majority, if not all, of the women who enter into these marriages are not aware of the fact that their children will not be entitled to Egyptian citizenship, Atiya said. And, even those who know that marriage to foreigners will preclude citizenship for their children believe that this does not apply in the case of Arab husbands. Foreigners are typically classed as Westerners, Asians or Africans.

Women as young as 16 years old are coerced, emotionally blackmailed or tempted into these short-term relationships in order to bring in money for their families. And once into the marriage, it is often not registered with the appropriate Egyptian agency.

More often than not, these women encounter harsh situations with which they are unable to cope.

"Instead of solving their families' financial problems, they actually aggravate them since they now have children who must be supported, cared for and raised at the same cost as that of raising foreign children," stated Atiya.

Legal recourse is not much of an option. Embassies of the father's country are generally unhelpful when it comes to getting child support. "I went to the embassy at least 20 times before I was allowed to speak to the official concerned," recalled one woman who wished to remain anonymous.

Her subsequent meeting failed to dispel her fears. "I had official proof that for two years I was married to a man from this country, and a birth certificate with the father's name on it. I finally managed to get a few months of child support." But neither the amount of money nor the payment arrangements were satisfactory.

Not all the women, however, are this "lucky." "For the most part, these women are left in a situation where they cannot get any help from either their country or the father's country," said Tahani Heikal, a member of the Cairo-based Arab Women's Alliance which last year launched a year-long awareness programme in Cairo and Giza to familiarise illiterate and semi-literate poor women with their basic legal rights. "Research has shown that this particular problem is quite common in and outside Greater Cairo, and, as a result, we are taking this programme into rural areas as well."

In the meantime, while this programme takes off, thousands of women have to cope with their less-than-ideal marriages or, worse still, enter into new ones so as to get money for their children.

To alleviate their burden, some women attempt to persuade orphanages to take their children, and later go back to adopt them, said one social worker. "It's a risk they take, but they don't have many options before them," she added.

With the problem clearly defined, the search is on for a solution.

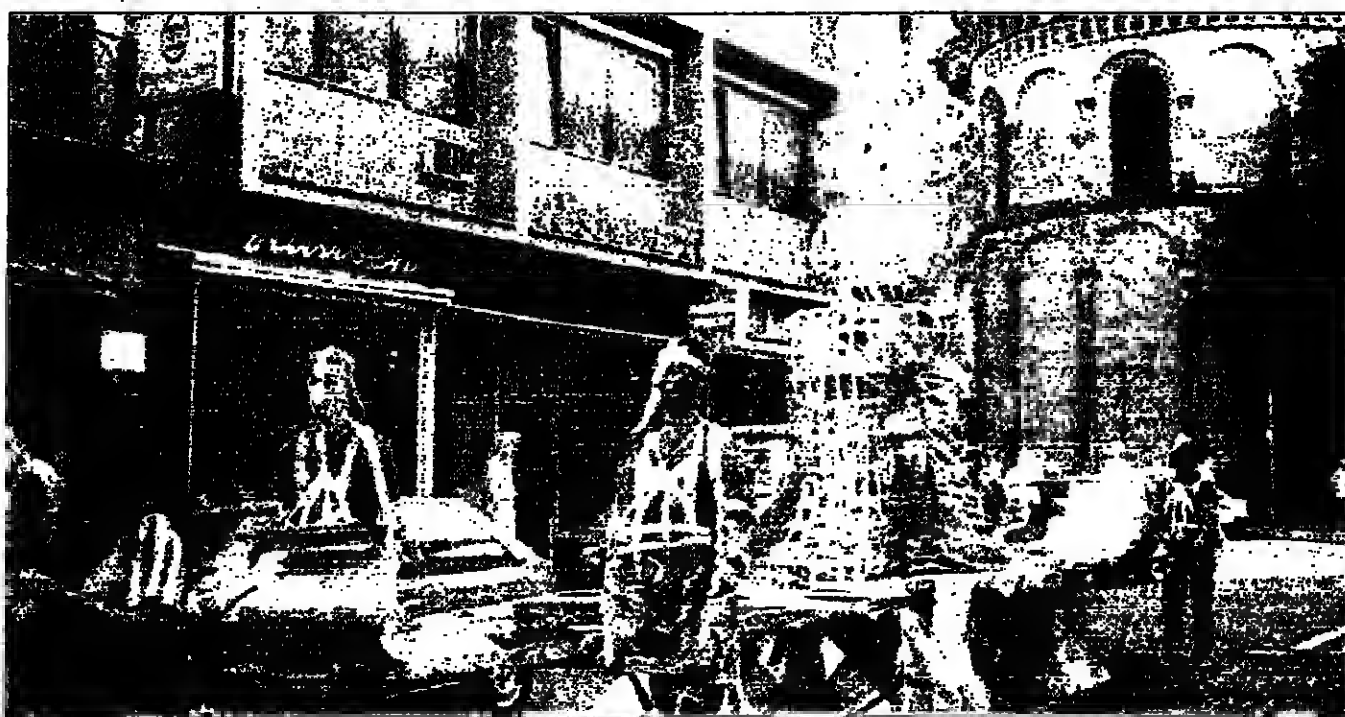
Rebirth on the Nile

LAST MONDAY the city of Luxor celebrated Sham El-Nessim by stepping 5,000 years back in time, reports *Tass Hama*. On the day recognised by the ancient Egyptians as officially marking the beginning of spring, a time of new life and vitality, Rehah Saad saw German artist Anny-Ra's sculpture finally come home to rest. And while most Egyptians celebrated by getting together with family and friends and headed for the nearest park, sports club or strip of grass, the city of Luxor was treated to a celebration of a more unusual kind.

Here's a riddle for you: what's made of aluminum and brass, is four metres high and ten metres long and has a protruding stomach? Why, a pregnant Pharaonic mummy of course.

German artist Anny-Ra's sculpture, costing over LE1 million to make, may have been paraded around various German cities over the past few years as it waited for the wheels of bureaucracy to roll, but last Monday, Sham El-Nessim, the artist was finally able to present her work as a gift and a "sign of love" to the city of Luxor, and at the same time give it its appropriate place by the Nile in order to "remain exposed to all people."

Under the patronage of the Egyptian Tourist Authority and head of the Supreme Council of the city of Luxor Maj. Gen. Mohamed Yousef Habib, the sculpture — looking more post-modern than Pharaonic — was carried from the city's temple by four "pregnant" pharaohs, sporting round brass and aluminum bellies, and followed by a music and dance troupe, *tabalin*, and a procession of *hantours* down to its final resting place. Inspired by ancient Egyptian mythology — to the point of wearing Pharaonic clothes and eye make-up and living in a room in Germany redesigned to look like an ancient Egyptian tomb — artist Anny-Ra sees the mummy more as a *subject* rather than an object of art, an autonomous and living work symbolising the eternal recurrence of the cycle of time, with a body designed for bearing new life. "It is the art of yesterday, today and tomorrow," she claims. And to prove it, in a final and ultimate symbolic act, there on the banks of the Nile the mummy gave "birth" to life as a man emerged from the sculpture, marking not only the eternal relationship between life and death and beginning of the season of vitality and life, but also the beginning of a cultural agreement between the German city of Umm, and Luxor.



The statue was paraded around cities in Germany until, last Monday, it reached its final destination in Luxor

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

The first thing one encounters as one enters the headquarters of the Press Syndicate in Cairo is a bust of Ahmed Helmi, the founder of the newspaper, *Al-Qatr Al-Masri*. On 16 April 1909, *Al-Qatr Al-Masri* was suspended from publication and Helmi was sentenced to 10 months in prison on the charge of libel against the khedive. The bust was commissioned to commemorate him as one of Egypt's first martyrs to the cause of the freedom of expression.

It is not widely known, however, that 12 years previously, in 1897 to be precise, a harsher sentence was pronounced against the owner of the newspaper *Al-Sa'ia*, Ahmed Fouad, who implicated in the charges brought against him Sheikh Mustafa Lutfi El-Manfalouti, a writer who would later acquire considerable renown.

There are several reasons why the syndicate would commemorate Helmi and ignore Fouad. Firstly, the Abbas II of 1909 who had come under attack by Helmi was not the same Abbas II of 1898 who was criticised by the owner of *Al-Sa'ia*. Whereas in 1898 the khedive was an ardent opponent of the British, by 1909 he had struck up an alliance with the forces of occupation. Secondly, Helmi was a prominent member of the National Party and his criticism emanated from the stance of a broad-based popular political movement. Fouad, on the other hand, was in collusion with one of the khedive's advisers. Nor were Egyptians particularly sympathetic to *Al-Ahram*, in its coverage of Fouad's trial, continuously referred to him as the "arrogant youth". Yet, even though Fouad lacks the nationalist credentials of Helmi, the affair of his trial is interesting to follow, which is exactly what *Al-Ahram* did when it was on the scene nearly a hundred years ago.

When, after a trip abroad, the Khedive Abbas II returned to Cairo on the morning of 3 November 1898, there was an unpleasant surprise in store for him. A satirical poem had been printed and distributed among the inhabitants of the capital. The opening verse reads:

A feast it is, though a happy one I dare not say
A king we have, who with the days will pass away.

The verse aroused *Al-Ahram's* disapproval and a week later it commented, "We deeply regret the unfathomable depths to which some of our capital's rabble have sunk and the perilous moral chaos this implies." The perpetrators, it went on to say, should be subjected to the harshest penalties.

The following day, the newspaper informed its readers that the government, upon reviewing the matter, decided to prosecute "the insolent man" who wrote the poem. "Hopefully the government will teach him a lesson that will also serve as a deterrent against others, who are so emboldened by the freedom of the press or by the protection they enjoy from a foreign government that they subject His Royal Highness to such overt and tendentious calumny." The "insolent man", the newspaper revealed, was the owner of *Al-Sa'ia* "whose ignominy will be exposed by the courts".

Within less than a week after the investigations had begun, four people were brought to trial. Collectively they were given the epithet "the insolent fools", and the offending verse was named "the poem of the insolent". The ringleader, El-Sayed Mohamed Tawfiq El-Bakri, was a former classmate and a long-time acquaintance of the khedive. Soon after he ascended the throne, Abbas II appointed El-Bakri as the grand sheikh of the office of the Sufi orders and as the head of the syndicate of Sufi orders. Some months later, Abbas also appointed him as a member of the Shura Council.

Although Abbas must have believed that he had cornered some effective support and influence through

these sensitive positions, it soon became apparent that El-Bakri was not as amenable as the khedive had hoped. El-Bakri soon lost favour with the khedive, as is evidenced from an *Al-Ahram* account of a visit El-Bakri had made to Istanbul. When he arrived, El-Bakri told officials at the Supreme Porte that he was there in an official capacity as the khedive's representative. "Officials in the chief chamberlain's office were surprised by the claim, and the permanent representative of the khedive was asked whether he had any knowledge of El-Sayed El-Bakri's mission. The representative answered that he had no such knowledge. Then they wired an inquiry to the khedive himself, who denied El-Bakri's claim in no uncertain terms."

The rebuke implicit in the khedive's reply could hardly be more telling, and in April 1898 he dismissed El-Bakri as head of the syndicate of Sufi orders. Although he retained the title of grand sheikh of the Sufi orders, El-Bakri, who would not forgive the khedive for his slight, hid his time until the opportunity for revenge presented itself.

The identity and the role of the other three "insolent fools" were revealed in a succession of *Al-Ahram* releases. On 13 November, the newspaper received "a special telegram" reporting that the author of the contentious verse was Sheikh Mustafa Lutfi (who had not yet acquired the name El-Manfalouti), the printer was Sheikh Mohammed El-Khayyami, a former judge in Giza, and the distributor was the owner of *Al-Sa'ia*.

In a subsequent edition, *Al-Ahram* published the official proceedings of the investigation. "When asked whether it was he who had written the poem, Ahmed Fouad answered 'Yes'. Then he was asked who had given him financial assistance to publish it and he answered that he had funded it himself. He was then asked which publishing house printed it and he responded that it was that of Sheikh Mohamed El-Khayyami, a former religious judge in Giza who had been dismissed from his post. When asked who had written the poem, Ahmed Fouad indicated Sheikh Mustafa Lutfi El-Manfalouti, who, when asked to corroborate, responded that he had only corrected it."

Continuing its reporting of the investigation, *Al-Ahram* recounts that the proprietor of *Al-Sa'ia* said that he was driven to his action by his anger at authorities of the royal court. "He related a story, the crux of which is that after having published the first two editions of his newspaper, a royal police officer came to impose the third edition on the pretext that his newspaper defamed the owners of *Al-Muqattam*. Deeply incensed, he decided to seek revenge." Concluding its report on the proceedings of the first day, *Al-Ahram* announces, "Ahmed Fouad, the owner of *Al-Sa'ia*, Sheikh Mohamed El-Khayyami and Sheikh Mustafa Lutfi, to whom is attributed most of the verses of the poem, have all been detained since yesterday."

Al-Ahram readers had to wait with bated breath until 16 November 1898 for further news. They would not be disappointed, for that edition packed a couple of surprises, the first of which was to reveal, for the first time, the involvement of Tawfiq El-Bakri. In a report, "direct from our Cairo correspondent", it is announced that Sheikh Mustafa Lutfi and Ahmed Fouad confessed that El-Bakri had composed some of the verses of the poem and that "he had paid them four pounds in advance and had promised to pay them an additional six pounds once the poem had been printed and distributed". The news was confirmed in a "special telegram" sent to the offices of *Al-Ahram* at 12.15 that day and which said, "It has been established in the investigation that El-Sayed El-Bakri, contrary to his attestation, has been in continuous contact with Ahmed Fouad and is an acquaintance of Sheikh Mustafa Lutfi

126 Friction between the royal Abdin Palace and the British high commissioner's office in Cairo's Garden City, formerly known as Qasr El-Dubara, was a permanent feature of Egypt's political life after the British occupation began in 1881. In today's instalment of his chronicles of contemporary life, as reported by *Al-Ahram*, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq tells of a court case that exemplified British pressure



and that he wrote some of the verses of the poem."

The second surprise came in another special dispatch from *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in Cairo. It reads, "Sources confirm that the British have been attempting to obstruct the investigations that are currently under way with regard to the insolent verses that have been distributed in the capital. The British do not want the perpetrators to be exposed because they are supporters and servants of the occupation. The people, however, hope that the government will continue to pursue its course with steadfastness and resolve, so as to disclose the truth about the renegades."

At this juncture, the case of the insolent verse evolved into another of the many chapters in the rivalry between the khedive in Abdin Palace and the British High Commissioner. The first signs of this dimension emerged from *Al-Muqattam*, the Arabic-language mouthpiece of the British occupation. Not only did the newspaper's owners have foreknowledge of the scandalous poem, they delighted in its dissemination.

It was not long before the actors on behalf of the British became apparent. Foremost among these was John Scott, the judicial advisor to the Egyptian government and one of the mainstays of British hegemony. Scott objected that the Egyptian investigator in charge of the case did not follow proper legal procedures when conducting the search of El-Bakri's home, confiscating papers that had no bearing on the case. This prompted *Al-Ahram* to comment, "Yet, we know that the investigating judge has never deviated from the proper performance of his duties. We, therefore, strongly suspect that such an allegation is nothing but a rumour propagated by the enemies of truth. If this is in fact the case, it constitutes the first step on the part of the occupiers toward suppressing the evidence in the trial."

That machinations were afoot soon became apparent when Hamdallah Bek Amin, the public prosecutor, was dismissed from his post. The story behind his dismissal appeared in *Al-Ahram* on 20 November. The newspaper relates that John Scott summoned the public prosecutor to ask him to replace the investigating judge. "When Amin refused, Scott asked him, 'Are you certain that the investigation is proceeding correctly?' Amin, responded in the affirmative and substantiated his answer with a precise legal account of the procedures. Scott then retorted, 'Then we do not agree.'"

The newspaper continues, "Lord Cromer notified the ministers of the interview between Scott and Amin and when he met His Royal Highness, the khedive, he informed him that Scott threatened to resign if the public prosecutor was not dismissed from his post. The khedive responded that he would look into the matter. He summoned the ministers and asked them whether the investigation was not proceeding according to proper procedures. The ministers answered that it was not, and that they unanimously approved the British request to dismiss Amin. They departed with ashen faces. Shortly afterwards they submitted their decision to dismiss Hamdallah Bek and to appoint Mr. Corbet in his place." Thus the British killed two birds with one stone. With this appointment of Vincent Corbet, a justice in the court of appeals, as the public prosecutor, they tightened their grip over the Egyptian court system and virtually assured El-Bakri a favourable outcome in the trial.

Al-Ahram was quick to express its consternation: "This incident, which has provoked deep anxiety in public opinion, was, in sum, nothing but an event contrived by the British so as to achieve a long-chested ambition: to get control over the public prosecutor's office, after they had gained control over all the important branches of the Justice Department." With regard to the prospects for El-Sayed El-Bakri, the newspaper's commentary was biting. "Congratulations are in order to El-Bakri, who, tomorrow, will trample over heads of the judges and the prosecution, sporting the smile of the victorious conqueror, as he gloats over the damage he has wreaked upon the justice system."

The investigations were suspended for four days, while Corbet prepared to take over the position vacated by Amin. On 25 November, Corbet was sworn in before the khedive as public prosecutor. Afterwards, the investigation resumed, making a course more favourable to the British, amidst a general outcry in the national and the French press.

The first objective of the new public prosecutor was to have the charges against El-Sayed El-Bakri dropped. The card he played was the illegal confiscation of El-Bakri's papers, which, *Al-Muqattam* insinuated, the khedive was eager to obtain in order to gain private information about El-Bakri. The suggestion put Abbas on the defensive. He told his ministers that he was not particularly offended by the poem and said, "If you truly intend to discipline the perpetrator in a legal manner, I trust that it will be

entirely above suspicion."

Scott formed a three-member tribunal chaired by the minister of justice. After determining procedural misconduct in the course of investigations, the case against El-Bakri was dismissed. On 29 November, *Al-Ahram's* Cairo correspondent rushed off the following telegram: "Charges against El-Bakri dropped, the others to be prosecuted!"

The outcry in the national press was unanimous. "The charges fit El-Bakri like a suit that had been specially tailored for his height and girth," exclaimed *Al-Ahram* in shock and dismay. In a cooler tone, the following day it commented, "Procedural matters saved El-Bakri from charges that would have led to certain conviction. This demonstrates that rescuing El-Bakri was no trifling matter for the senior occupation officials."

The French language newspapers, opposed to increased British control over Egypt, were equally outspoken. *Le Phare d'Alexandrie* contained the longest and sharpest commentary.

Now that the ringleader was removed to safety, only the smaller fish remained. Still, public interest in the proceedings was intense. Yet, when the news of the trial against Ahmed Fouad and his accomplices hit the press, it took up less than half a column on *Al-Ahram's* second page. It relates that Yusuf Bek Suleiman, chief prosecutor, "cited the grand popular welcome that awaited His Royal Highness upon his return from abroad, in contrast to the opening verse of that poem."

Ahmed Fouad, the story relates, recounted what he termed the injustices of previous rulers over Egypt. "Then he asked to be exonerated on the grounds that those in Europe who lampoon their rulers are not punished for such acts and he cited the incident in Ireland where the people made an effigy of the queen and conducted a mock burial ceremony during which they recited a litany of curses."

As for El-Manfalouti, "He stood, wan and frail, as though about to collapse at any moment, and reaffirmed that he was only an accomplice in the crime."

The court sentenced Ahmed Fouad to 20 months' prison and a fine of 30 pounds — "very harsh" in the words of *Al-Ahram*. El-Manfalouti was sentenced to 12 months' prison and a fine of 20 pounds, which was "not too difficult to bear". El-Khayyami, on the other hand, was acquitted on the grounds that the original perpetrator had been found.

Fouad and El-Manfalouti appealed, and a month and a half later, their case was heard again. In the end, both men were sentenced to six months in prison, which *Al-Ahram* found "more lenient". It expressed its sympathy for El-Manfalouti, "who was only an instrument in the hands of people who were spared from the hands of justice". The newspaper was not so generous with regard to Ahmed Fouad, "a young man of ill repute who was kicked out of his father's house."

As a footnote to its coverage of the "insolent verses", *Al-Ahram* appended a caution to Lord Cromer: "To the extent that he defends the honour of the His Royal Highness, the ruler of Egypt, he safeguards his personal honour and that of Her Royal Highness of Great Britain, whom he represents." To many, this implied that disdain for the khedive would reap dire results. One doubts that the British high commissioner heeded *Al-Ahram's* advice, which explains the continued rivalry between Abdin Palace and Dubara Palace.

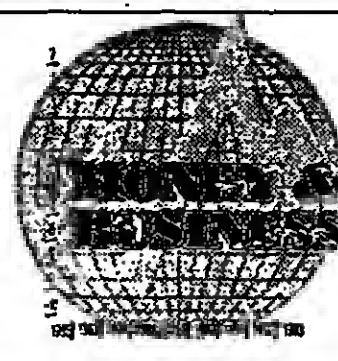
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



PRIME MINISTER
Kamal El-Ganzouri
recently appointed
Mohamed Madbouli
Sayed Ahmed to
vice-chairman of
the board of the
National Bank of
Egypt.



MONEY & BUSINESS



Free choice of images on new Euro currency

EUROPEAN financial ministers agreed that nations affiliated with the new Euro currency will be permitted to place their own designs on one side of the currency.

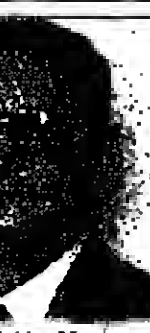
For monarchies such as Britain, the decision means that they will be permitted to place the image of Queen Elizabeth on the currency.

Financial ministers in the European Union agreed to the use of a common European currency as part of a new exchange mechanism involving member countries of the Union. The new mechanism would control exchange-rate fluctuations. The new currency is expected to be introduced in 1999.

Growth for Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt

ABDEL-HAMID Abu Musa, director of the Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt, said that the bank realised profits totalling LE213mn at the end of the third quarter of the current Islamic year (30 Ramadan 1316AH/ 19 February 1996). This is in contrast with the LE200mn that the bank realised during the same period of the previous year (1415AH/ March 1995). Returns distributed to investors reached LE204.5mn, against LE174.8mn in the previous year, an increase of 17 per cent.

The bank registered a clear growth in its various activities. The total volume of transactions increased by an equivalent of LE10bn at the end of the third quarter of the current year, compared to the LE8988mn that it gained during the same period of the previous year, an increase by 11.3 per cent. Customer deposits witnessed a growth, reaching an equivalent of



Abdel-Hamid Abu Musa

LE4988mn, in comparison to LE4791mn of the same period in the previous year, an increase of LE197mn. Eighty per cent of the bank's total deposits are made by families.

In addition, the balance of investment operations, such as partnerships and brokerages which the bank established with its customers increased by an equivalent of LE5577mn, in comparison with LE5380mn of the previous year, thus realising a growth of LE197mn. The private business sector comprised most of the balance of investment operations, which fell within a wide range of economic activities, with production in particular. These activities make up 80 per cent of the total balance of investment operations.

The number of companies of the bank working in numerous economic activities reached 37, with their capitals totalling LE1074mn.

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Turkish businessmen's delegation to Egypt



Hatay Satgeldi

HATAY Satgeldi, commercial counsellor at the Turkish Embassy in Cairo, stated to *Money and Business* that a Turkish businessmen's delegation will pay a visit to Egypt with the aim of consolidating economic ties between the two countries.

The delegation, which arrives in Cairo on 19 April, will visit numerous historical sites. On Sunday, 21 April, the delegation will meet with Soliman Reda, the Egyptian minister of industry, as well as Mamdouh El-Beltagi, minister of tourism.

Other highlights of the trip include a visit to a mattress factory in Abbasiya, and a visit to 10 Ramadan City.

Guweili assures the safety of imported meat to Egypt

AHMED GUWEILI, minister of commerce and development, took time from his busy schedule to visit the Cairo International Fair during its final day.

Eschewing the comfort of an automobile, Guweili spent over 6 hours touring the fair on foot, accompanied by Rushdi Saqr, president of the International Fair and Marketing Organisation, Hussein al-Badiyi, vice-president of the organisation, Wagdi Salih, commissioner of the organisation and Hanaa Shakir, president of the Cairo Market.

Guweili gave reassurances to the visiting public that the meat found in local markets is free of any disease, and that rigorous inspection is con-

ducted on meat imported to Egypt, an action taken many years prior to the emergence of the BSE disease. "The public should have no fear in buying imported meat," he stated.

The minister was impressed by the organisation of the fair and of the services provided to the public. He also thanked the fair's administration, headed by Rushdi Saqr, who made great efforts in handling both the internal and external logistics of the fair so that its goals could be met, which included opening markets for Egyptian products. He expressed the hope that next year's fair would show an increase in exhibitors and visitors.

During his tour, Guweili also visited the Ger-

men Pavilion, and was clearly impressed by the quality of displays there. He felt the selection of products and services there can also be used to serve the national economy. At a pavilion of food-stuff products, he encouraged producers to take an active role in promoting and advertising their products, for this too, in the long run, will benefit the national economy.

The minister visited other pavilions, including a furniture pavilion and met with members of the Chamber of Commerce of Dumyat, a town well-known for its craftsmanship of furniture. The minister expressed his pleasure at the developments which take place in this industry year after year, and wished it further success.

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Weightlifters stay in the lead

Once again, Egypt won the junior's and senior's African Weightlifting Championship held last week in Ismailia. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports



Egyptian juniors, seniors, and women lifting the lead



photos: Abdel-Aziz El-Nimr, and Saad Faggy El-Nour

ver the past ten years, Egyptian weightlifters have managed to snatch nearly all the titles in the Arab and African weightlifting competitions. During this year's African Weightlifting Championship, however, the task was not so easy.

This year's competition brought together 176 weightlifters from 11 countries to compete in the Sixth Juniors and 10th Seniors African Championships. And, said Gamil Hanna, president of the African and Egyptian Weightlifting Federation, "Egypt's strongest competition came from Cameroon, who received financing from the Olympic Solidarity Committee enabling them to train in France." The other notable contender was Algeria, whose team members trained in Bulgaria with some of the world's most powerful lifters. All three countries, however, breathed a sigh of relief as strong contender, Nigeria, failed to show up for the competition.

The three-day long competition, which began last Friday, witnessed the participation of Algeria's 70kg Olympic weight lifter, Yehawi Abdel-Moneim, Egyptian Champion, the 108kg Tharwat El-Bendari and Matam Ndiaka of Cameroon. Despite the presence of these strongmen, new African records were set by Egypt's 54kg Ali Hemid, who broke the old 130kg record with a 132.5kg total lift. In addition, Egypt's 59kg competitor, Mohamed Othman, successfully completed a 148.5kg jerk and a 115kg snatch for a total weight of 263.5kg. Rafat Galal, Egypt's 76kg contender, also set a new African record with a 147.5kg snatch and a 180.5kg jerk for a total of 328kg.

Along with favourites like Egypt and Algeria, some new teams, such as South Africa, participated this year. This competition marked the teams second appearance this year on the weightlifting arena after a 10-day absence. But whether or not they were favourites, all the participating countries approached the tournament with renewed zeal, although it was not a qualifier for the 1996 Olympic Games.

"The 10th African Championship is an opportunity for African countries to attract the attention of the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF), thereby giving them a better shot at one of the nine wild cards," said Samir Hanna, secretary of the African Weightlifting Federation.

Instead of making this competition a qualifier for the Olympics, the IWF has decided to select from each continent the two countries with the highest scores in the World Championships scheduled to be held in China earlier this year. Egypt and Algeria already have made the cut, with Tharwat El-Bendari and Yehawi Abdel-Moneim representing the two countries respectively.

On the sidelines of the competition, elections for officers in the African Weightlifting Federation were held, with Mabo Gnah from Tunisia and Ahmed Ibn-Deif of Algeria, running against other strong North African Arab candidates for the chairmanship of the board. It was, however, Gamil Hanna who came out ahead with a unanimous decision, securing the seat, while his brother, Samir Hanna, winning the secretary's seat as there were no other candidates.

For the position of vice-president of the federation, candidates from Algeria, Morocco, Mauritius and Kenya were nominated, while candidates from Cameroon, South Africa, Uganda, the Seychelles and Sudan ran for the five slots on the board. Egypt's Mahmoud Shukri was nominated as head of the Technical Committee and Dr Edmon Takla was nominated as head of the Medical Committee.

After the newly formed African Weightlifting Federation held its first meeting, a set of new regulations were issued, including new job descriptions for the various officials in the technical, medical and judging committees. "It is necessary to have professionally qualified people for these posts," said Gamil Hanna. The other new regulations included a subscription fee of \$100 instead of \$50 for entry into competitions, and for countries hosting championships, an insurance premium of \$50 must be paid in advance, refunded only if the host country fulfils its obligations.

In related news, the First Women's African Weightlifting Championship was scheduled to be held, but none of the African countries who had promised to bring their women's teams showed up. Therefore, Egypt's female weightlifters competed against themselves in an attempt to break the records they set in last year's national championship. The competition also served as a warm-up for the team, as it is scheduled to compete in next May's World Championship in Poland.

Reflex referees

A recently-concluded training programme for referees and coaches of speedball aimed to keep officials on the cutting edge of the sport. Eric Asomugha reports

As speedball's popularity increases, so too does the demand for qualified referees and coaches. This was the driving force behind a recent training programme held at the Leadership Training Centre in Zanzibar under the auspices of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS), the Egyptian Speedball Federation and the International Speedball Federation.

"The popularity of speedball has grown steadily over the last few years," said Ismail Hassan, the head of the training programme. "And, over the coming year, the sport will quickly spread to more schools. The services of qualified coaches and referees will be needed in these schools and in sporting clubs."

The one week-long training programme attracted 36 participants, nearly half of whom were novices to the sport. With the focus being on improving training methods, developing player skills and promoting the sport in Egypt, the programme was divided into three daily sessions. Two of the sessions were directed at classroom study and practical training time, while

the final session was an oral, written and practical test, with national speedball coach, Mohamed Amin, and his assistant Ali Gomaa, in charge of the practical training part of the course. Other instructors included Ahmed Abdel-Gabal, who headed the referee training part of the course, and several experts from Helwan University's Faculty of Physical Education.

Participants trained on words in expressing the importance of training and keeping abreast of changes in the sport. "It was a positive step," said Sahar Fayed, a trainee referee. "One of the major points of change that came out of the course was modifying the serving position. The 1.5m single point from the pole on which a server must step before serving is now a line which has been extended backwards to provide the server with more comfort."

"This should help reduce the incidence of serving faults resulting from the server being too cramped, and will be of special benefit to taller players," she said.

Trainee referees expressed differing views in implementing changes that would allow refereeing matches more flexibly. The serving rules, said Mostafa Mustafa, a referee, need to be amended more. "The 25cm distance allowed for a served ball to go up or down the 1.70m speedball pole is a bit too dicy to judge easily," he said. "Since the aim of the serve is to start the game and for a receiver to return it, I think a 20cm range of play in the serve is ideal. This will reduce the number of high serve fouls and arguments that ensue as a result."

The main complaint about the training programme, most agreed, was that it was too short. One week, felt the participants, is not enough time to churn out good referees and coaches. "It's a good start, but good referees and coaches cannot be produced in such a short period of time," said Osama Fawzi, a veteran referee. "Most of the trainees here don't know a thing about the game and rely heavily on the experienced refs. We hope the programme

will be extended for more than one week in the future."

Along with the usual group of aspiring refs and coaches, the programme also drew a few individuals interested in either honing their skills or becoming players. One of these new players was Esther Luyckx, a Belgian. "I've liked speedball since the first time I played it at the Heliopolis Sporting Club," she said. "I hope to be a good player in the future and hopefully represent Belgium in the future."

Mohamed Lotfi, the president of the ISBF, said the next World Speedball Championship will be held in Belgium next fall. Among the countries expected to participate are Egypt, France, Nigeria, Austria, Slovenia, Japan, Bosnia, the US and Belgium.

Women's soccer upsurge

IT HAS been a busy period for Egypt's women's soccer team. Inas Mazhar reports. The country's national women's team recently played two friendly matches against Switzerland's Bern team, the first of which was played at Al-Batros village in Hurgada. The match was played under the auspices of Hurgada's new governor, who sent buses to transport students from near-



by schools to enable them to attend the match. For the Egyptian women's team, amid throngs of cheering spectators, the match ended in triumph, with them trouncing their Swiss counterparts 6-1.

The second match was played in Cairo, as part of the festivities surrounding the celebration of the Giza Governorate's national day. The match was held in the Tarsana Stadium and attracted hundreds of fans. This time, the Swiss held off the Egyptian onslaught and managed to tie the match 3-3.

Sahar El-Hawary, who is responsible for organising and overseeing the women's football matches in Egypt, said that she was happy with the results of both matches. El-Hawary added that the main aim of these matches, training the women's team by exposing the players to strong foreign teams, was more than realised.

"We are approaching an important period in the near future and have to train harder in order to enter the African qualification matches for the upcoming World Cup, scheduled to be held in three years," she said. "The team needs to train and gain more experience, as well as learn not to fear or underestimate their opponents."

This week the women's team is participating in a joint training camp with the Swiss team, Basle. The camp is being held at the Al-Batros village in Hurgada, under the supervision of Kamel Abu-Ali, vice-president of the Swiss Neuchatel team.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

Olympics countdown

The last 100 days

NINETY-nine days and 2,500 miles (4,000 kilometres) 17: their destination, America's Olympic leaders last week began their final preparations for the Atlanta Games.

Flame by train

A SPECIALLY-built train car that will carry the Olympic flame for the first time by rail received a final polish last week by workers preparing it for a 3,500 mile journey from Yuma, Arizona, to Chicago. The Cauldron car, constructed in four months on a 60-foot (18 metre) flat car, will carry the flame as part of the 1996 Olympic Torch Relay. It will be pulled by two specially-built locomotives on a 42-city whistle-stop tour.

The train trip begins 30 April in Yuma and ends 3 June in Chicago. The propane-fuelled flame will be carried between rail segments and from Chicago to Atlanta by torchbearers using other modes of transportation, including bicycle, canoe, steamboat and horseback.

Gone with the wind

THE HOUSE where Margaret Mitchell wrote "Gone with the Wind" will be completely rebuilt in time for the Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia, by the building's owner, Daimler-Benz. It will be opened to the public on 30 June.

Daimler-Benz has budgeted \$4.5 million for the reconstruction of the house which was almost completely destroyed in a 1994 fire. Company officials said the rebuilding would be completed in time for the Olympic Games, which start 19 July in the city where Mitchell wrote her worldwide bestseller about the American Civil War.

The facade of the house on Peachtree Street will be true to the turn-of-the-century southern American architectural style. The rest of the house will be used for offices and exhibits, although the room where Mitchell did her writing is to be restored.

During the Olympics, Daimler-Benz will use the house for an exhibit on "Art and Mobility," celebrating 110 years of the automobile. Cars from various decades will be exhibited along with pictures from the "Cars" series by the late pop artist, Andy Warhol.

Peace Corps ease

MORE than 500 former Peace Corps volunteers will help ease a concern for Olympic officials, who had worried they might not have enough volunteer translators at the Games. Through their combined knowledge, the Peace Corps members are fluent in 200 languages and dialects.

Bad design

ATLANTA Olympic organisers have sued the designers of the Olympic stadium for six million dollars in response to the firm's four million dollar lawsuit against organisers for unpaid overtime.

Three million dollars in repairs are being conducted to prevent sags and cracks in the \$230 million stadium, with safety a concern in the wake of a toppled light tower that killed a steelworker last year.

Organisers said the designers' team "is exclusively liable for this tragedy" and made "hundreds of design errors". It also claims the designers knew of flaws two weeks before the mishap but did nothing. Designers blame "complete chaos" by the organisers for the mishap and 47,600 unpaid overtime hours.

Final drill

SECURITY officials are preparing for this week's three-day drill, a final effort to make certain all anti-terrorist plans are in place and working well. Federal troops are taking part in a crucial training test next week, and thousands of agents from the FBI and CIA will join state and local police in safeguarding the centennial Olympics.

Compiled by Nashwa Abdel-Tawab

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Nevine Allouba: Glitz at the opera

Neither sinking ship nor nuclear disaster. What then? Tiger lily, not camellia. Say no, so she does it

Nevine Allouba is a singer, as everyone knows. Like many singers she looks impressive — *bien plantée*. At times, she has a "don't come too close" expression. So much the better: as a rule familiarities are not encouraged by singers, as they are of a race that occupies a very special place in our crazy, colorful, besotted society. Their once exalted position has been eroded by almost any show-biz of paradise with a saleable exterior. The media has removed the aura and the halo from around them but put back nothing, except possibly a good aesthetic dental job in their place. Talk-show ladies do not fit opera singers. They are an endangered species: recording has helped but demoted them. The big groups who run the record business splash around the word "diva".

In 1996, the word fits almost anything — lady javelin throwers at the Olympics, mud-wrestlers, fame-battered royals, even Monica Carlo herself has become a diva. Diva Junk Land is dumpland and holds anything saleable. How then is the lightbulb to be walked by a singer of quality such as Allouba? What is a singer — how does she become a diva? The gods arrange it: a question of talent, brains, cunning and the chances of destiny. Scandal and a travel-bag full of life agencies with the exterior safety level of an army tank, with which to survive it all.

There goes the diva. In other ages, we all stood up as she passed. Melba was one at 20, and could have been the queen of France. Termini and Milanov were born divas, Callas, who started out as Gary Cooper but with more poundage, ended in the same shades as Marilyn Monroe, without voice or career. She was the Helen of her own Trojan war and rode to destruction through the flame of her special apocalypse by kicking the whole diva business to pieces. Just a second — wasn't this supposed to be about Nevine Allouba? So where is she in all this dusk of the divas?

She's here and there: she's a singer. Can she ever be a diva? It depends. She has the looks, the character and some of the wings necessary. Does she occupy the exact moment in her own historical time? And the voice? Is it capable of diva-hood? Does she even want any of it? Where's the scandal, where the conniving multitudes hanging onto their CDs for signatures? Is she about to run off with an arms dealer, kicking away marriage and children? She can run away from almost anything except time, and of course fame cannot be bought. It's all accidental, like a sinking ship or a nuclear disaster. And Allouba is neither. And the voice, have you forgotten the voice?

No, it is a peculiar voice, like Peter Pears. It is capable of very strange things.

Who are you talking to?

Myself, like all operatic psycho-paths.

We must begin at the beginning. So she sings. So do lots of people. Why not get on to politics, sex and cars — the know-where-you-are things and leave theological aspects of singing to the encyclopedias. Because Nevine Allouba has reached a tangential departure point in her career as a singer, which is exciting. She invites conjecture because she is good and original.



Nevine Allouba: Whatever she sings, there is clarity, style and a quick perception of what the music needs. The word, the meaning, come first, the rhythm always



She was born in England of an Egyptian father and a half-English mother, educated here in the English mission college in Cairo, sang and played the piano as a child. Later she went to Madame Olga Yassa for piano study and to the conservatoire for music and voice. She worked with Nabila Erian and Violette Makkar.

She sang here in concerts but she was never a soubrette-type, even as a teenager, and her voice, though light, has always had a curious dark, vibrating tone which, when needed, can be very moving in opera.

She has her doctoral qualifications in music and the teaching of singing. Her travels have taken her to Germany and the Hamburg opera where she was a member of the chorus. She listened to and studied with the great Wagnerian soprano Birgit Nilsson in classes and finally began intense work with Professor Ewa Thieszen. This professor, noted for her sharp tongue, exacting standards and punishing demands on her chosen pupils, thinks very highly of Allouba and sees exciting vistas ahead for her.

As singer, Nevine Allouba, apart from voice and musicality, has the gift of languages. She speaks and sings fluently in German, French, Italian, English and Arabic. She is versatile: from pop through Gershwin and Cole Porter, she travels to Schubert, Brahms and Hugo Wolf — and beyond into the twentieth century. She does better than the visitors in the soprano part of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Whatever she sings — Handel or Mozart — there is clarity, style and a quick perception of what the music needs. The manner is the singer, it is said. For this young Egyptian soprano shows a remarkable feeling for the word and the form. She never merely stands and delivers, even in concert. The word, the meaning, come first, so even in music lying

outside her preferred range, she gives a feeling of security and almost practicality. So the rhythm is always firm, and the tempo, what is written. She is not given to mannerisms, and goes to her business like the professional manager of a department store. She gives the notes and the narrative. If this sounds official, she is a bit of a boss. The manners are perfect, the walking to and fro imposing, and the intelligence behind it all puts her in the chair and in control.

Some say she knows too much. Can you, about singing? Some say she cannot sing at all and should have stayed with acting. Her parents have always been a strong support. Her mother wants her to choose for herself. Allouba chose early to be an actress. The spoken theatre thrills her, the living-in and being someone else, then, when the whole show is over, skipping off home to children — and being someone else again. And going on and on being someone else and where is Nevine Allouba in all this?

Early on they found the voice. She decided, large or small, high or low, to go beyond talking to singing, because singing should be talking, with added vibrations. No one has ever questioned her intelligence, but often doubted the voice. With her drive towards drama and transformation she could never have stayed in Baroque or concert work. She needed a theatre and all its hassle and tension. She thrives on stress. It positively lifts her. Like ballerinas, singers seem to need stress to activate themselves properly. And costume — rag or glitz, it's all part of being Tosca or the quirky lady whom the Moor strangles at the end of *Otello*. She never had to change her mind, she changed her voice and the plans she had for it. Again, some say it is a light voice, a voice for early music and small lieder. She says no. She says Marie in *Wozzeck* and Elsa the thoroughly mixed-up heroine of Wagner's *Lohengrin*, these are where she wishes to go. Controversy. Hands rise in protest. But Allouba drives on.

Traviata — *Violetta*. She can never do it. So she did it — a very interesting *Traviata*, more Balzac's *Splendeur et misère de courtoisane*, more Esther Gobsek than any fragile lady. She was a girl fly, not a camellia. Allouba is interesting because she is a living proof of Lilli Lehmann's mighty sayings that it is all hard work, dedication and sacrifice.

She more or less retired from singing to take on motherhood, problem number one for a singer. She had two boys, five and three; the static period of singing to the baby is now passing and the active — travel and struggling, taking on her career — begins again. Allouba feels she must try somewhere to justify herself — she is studying. Desdemona in *Otello* heads the list.

Her feeling for the German repertoire which suits her voice presents problems at the Cairo opera. The history of opera — pre-war, golden and grandiose — and the present, austere and strictly cash-limited — has always been Italian. Her vocal style, therefore, is constricted to types and characters that give her no chance to show her true talents. The Cairo Opera seems not to venture the risk of local singers in unknown operas. The audience for any opera at all is restricted here to the point of invisibility, so who will come to see *Bluebeard's Castle* of Bartok with Reda El-Wakil and Nevine Allouba in the leading roles, and El-Saedi conducting? Spin the wheel.

Cairo has its Byzantine past, and one thing left behind is its talent for gossip. Cairo is gossip, like Vienna. What this city lacks in public publicity is almost compensated for by its talent for spinning beautiful tales. Exciting. Never go into the forest if you are afraid of the computers. Allouba adores the closet aspect. She

is well-strung for full sound impact, and not the Lucrezia Borgia whom gossip supposes. She's too humorous. She manages best with laughter. She's jolly.

She says she is not much interested in virtues and commendations. Previous articles have done all this. She knows her life and career are at a crossroads — she knows the strange appeal of her voice has yet to grow and develop into an instrument tough enough to do battle with the "heavies" she will herself to attempt. So she is an adventure, one of those who will indeed take the leap — into glory, she laughs, and not a flop.

Thunderclap Allouba takes the plunge. Why not plunge into *The Rosenkavalier* with the marshallin as well as Octavian, the boy she loves, a dusky soprano? Why not?

Allouba starts to talk. "There are two parts I love the most, to be given me in heaven in recompense for good deeds on earth: Verdi's *Lady Macbeth* and Richard Strauss's *Solenne*." — general gasps: both roles are killers. But Nevine Allouba has great powers of transformation. For singing she has a voice of coloured tinambulations. Such voices do exist. Leonie Rysanek is one. Allouba needs a special person who will set her destiny into a rainbow-shaped career.

Voices are not violins or pianos. They have a uniqueness special to a mind, a heart and a living body. These people need to be thrust into a position of action. They are mostly extremely vulnerable. Allouba needs this push, the material is there, and she even looks right.

One cold winter night in Cairo, someone who knows her as an artist went on a visit to the huge Balloon Theatre to see her before the performance. It had been raining. Theatre and surroundings were properly wet and unpleasant. Allouba was playing the role of the Empress Eugenie. Other actors and theatre workers were passing in and out of the stage door. The place smelled wet, overpopulated — and of theatre. Allouba? Yes, up the stairs, along the passage to the end. The stairs are sloppy and dangerous. She's there on the end on a dais in a lean-to room like a circus changing place. Nevine Allouba, draped in a barber's white sheet pulled tightly over her upper body, right to the neck, leaving the head protruding out from the sheet. The dark hair was scraped back from the face and covered to keep the powder that was being applied to the profile from dusting the face. There she was, be-headed by the sheet, the head sticking up formidably, the profile tilted insolently backwards — Allouba, an empress in a balloon, like a dream woman by Fellini — very much so because she started to laugh carefully as the make-up crew were retouching the cyclamen eye-shadow and the moon-cream flush across the cheek line of the face. She remained statue-calm, but shaking with laughter. Through pursed lips: "Hope you got the ticket I left at the entrance. Mind, it's cold down there." They closed her off from public view by the sweep of another curtain, this one not so white.

A big lady with a cyclamen-coloured head at the tip of a triangular white sheet. The smile was sweet, imperturbable, enigmatic. There was Allouba on her way. Bernard Shaw, who certainly knew, said all singers should live to be 200 years old because it took that much time to make a great one.

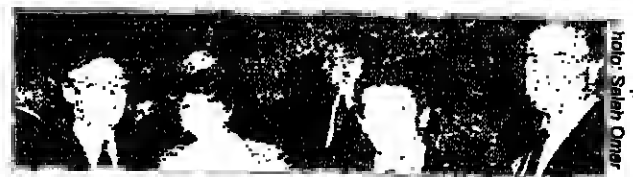
And Nevine Allouba is still on her way, taking on the challenge and the negative questions.

Profile by David Blake

Pack of cards

by Madame Sosostri

There's just enough space this week for me to tell you about a very special party I attended, the likes of which you don't come across often. My friend *Ihab Shafik* (far right in photo), who has been known to turn hovels into dream homes, entertained 201 select guests in a magnificent historic house in Doki El-Labana last week. I have never pretended to be a spring chicken, and so I can confess that I did time there often when the artist Milo was playing host in the '50s and '60s. At one point, the old stone walls resounded with the voices of art celebrities such as Inji Aflatoon, Georges Hain and many others. One of its floors was once occupied by the late renowned architect Hassan Fathi, and it is known that anybody who was somebody at the time sooner or later found his or her way to the famous house near the Citadel. Now it has an Agha Khan connection, because it is currently being leased by my good friend, his son *Sadrudin*, and this is how I found myself sampling the most extraordinary buffet, inspired and personally supervised by *Maxie Makhlouf* himself. While my good friend and colleague *Fayza Hassan* and I were stuffing ourselves with delicious *hors d'oeuvres* filled with various exotic ingredients, we shook hands with Foreign Minister *Amr Moussa*, (second from right in photo) his wife *Lella* and charming daughter *Hanya*, as well as French Ambassador *Patrick Leclercq* (far left in photo) and *Maxie's* lovely wife *Monia* (second from left in photo). I tried to avoid *Alaa Gheita* in case he advised me that it was time I visited him in his surgery for some highly needed "cosmetic surgery," but he was so enraptured by the cheese platters that he didn't even notice me.



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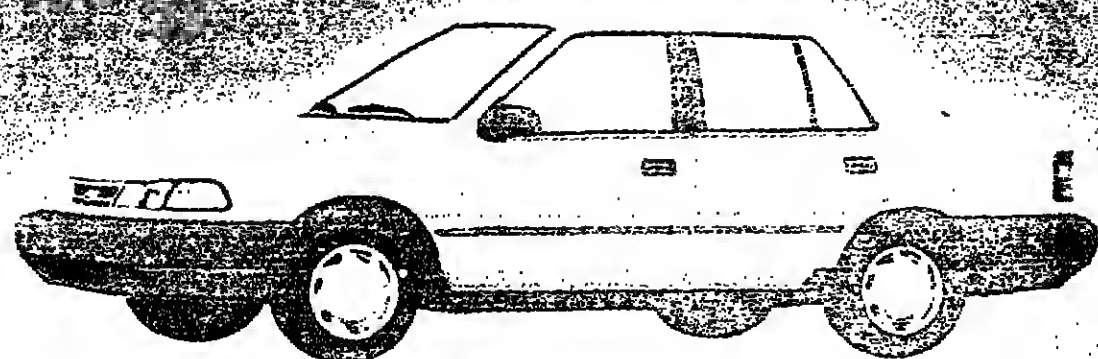
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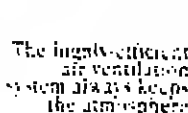
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